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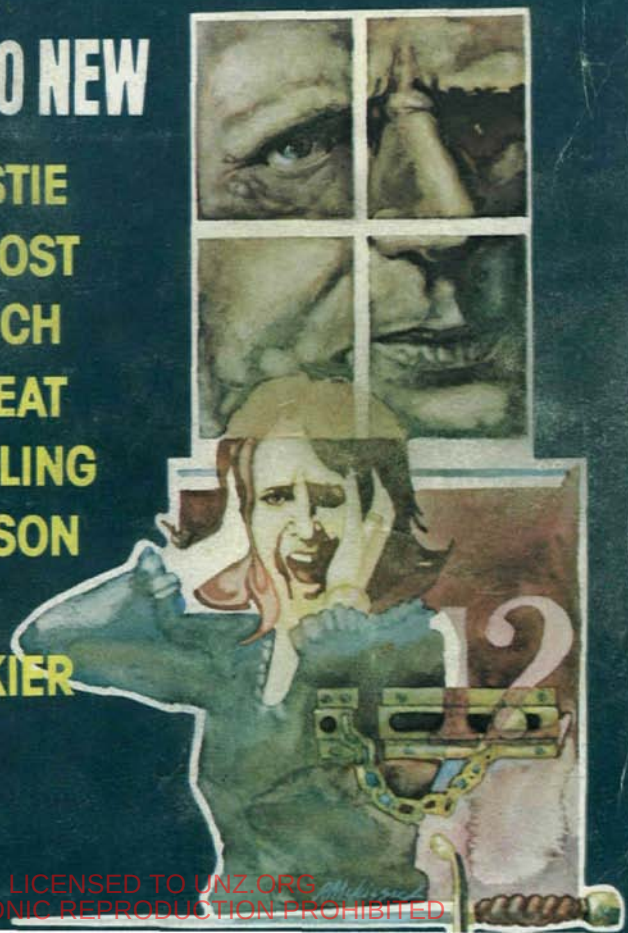

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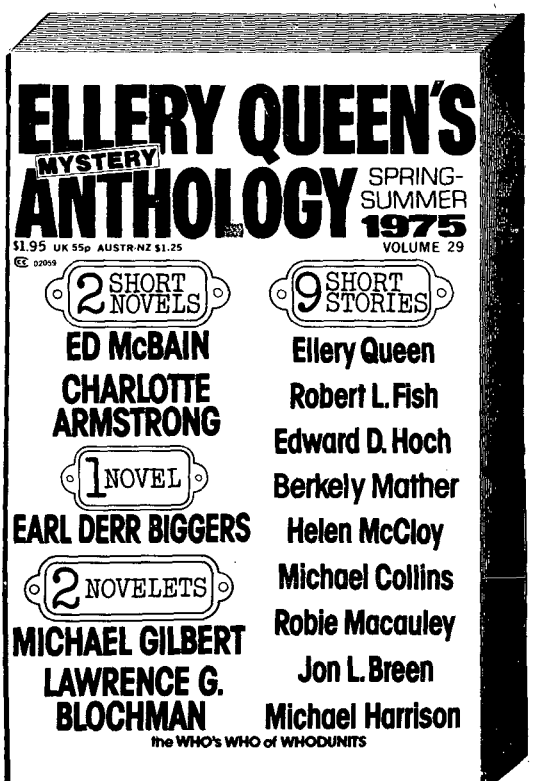

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Mystery Magazine

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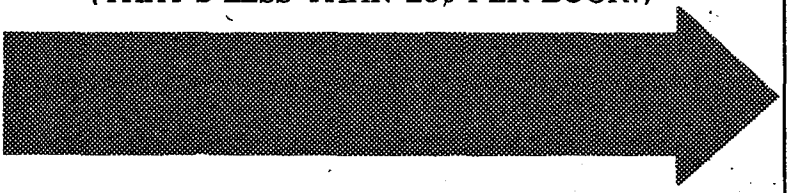

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a detective series to remember

and a time to remember . . .

The Declaration of Independence (more accurately, the Declaration of Separation) was adopted by the Continental Congress in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, under the leadership of John Hancock, John Adams, and Samuel Adams. The document was chiefly the work of Thomas Jefferson, with minor alterations made by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin before it was presented to the entire Congress.

On July 4, 1976 the United States of America, now grown from thirteen colonies to fifty states, will celebrate the bicentennial of that magnificent document (and truly the whole world should celebrate, for the whole world has benefited, and will continue to benefit, from it). In the year leading up to the commemorative event, we plan to publish a series of pre-Revolutionary detective stories. If all the stories materialize, there will be one representing each of the thirteen colonies, with Captain Jeremy Cork investigating "social puzzles" pertinent to the years preceding the Declaration of Independence and the war that won this country its political freedom. . .

The first story takes place in Virginia in 1751 and concerns the Spunton family. "The colorful colonial families," the author tells us, "were aristocratic in lineage and patrician in manner." But the landed gentry of the Old Dominion had its share, perhaps more than its share, of passion and violence. "The problem with this case," according to Captain Cork, "was that it had too many murders and too many motives". . .

"Q"

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THE MARGRAVE OF VIRGINIA

by S. S. RAFFERTY

Our arrival in the Virginia colony in the autumn of 1751 was another submission to one of Captain Cork's many fancies. Of course, his first love is the solution of crime, but his second is unmistakeably the theatre. When word reached us in New York that the famous Lewis Hallam and his family had arrived from England to perform *The Merchant of Venice* for the Royal Governor of Virginia, nothing could deter our coming to Williamsburg.

Although the trip south was uncomfortably passed aboard an ancient and ill-equipt coaster, the sparkle and gaiety of Williamsburg soon erased the foul memory of the journey.

Autumn is the gay season in this peninsula city where the old Tidewater gentry and the new Piedmont rich compete in extravagant outings. Balls, races, fairs, and other entertainment bloomed everywhere, and reportedly were not greatly inferior to London's in amusement and elegance.

We had taken rooms at the home of Telford Sheffield on the easterly end of Duke of Gloucester Street. It was a strategic move, for it put us only a few steps from the Raleigh Tavern, a focal point for revelry and good food. Eating, drinking, and carousing are some of Cork's other vices, and he likes to have them handy.

After thirteen days of gadding about, I began to excuse myself from Cork's torrent of social activities. I don't mean that I was bored; nay, I was exhausted. In the race for good times, I am but a quarter horse, good for a fast sprint, whereas my employer is a veritable thoroughbred, who must finish the whole course and then some.

One particular Thursday evening after dinner, I returned to our rooms alone. The Captain was off on another romp with a new lady friend—an association I hoped would not bring on another duel with another irate husband. As you can see, Cork's paean to life is a song of many verses.

I was immersed in an accounting of Cork's financial holdings when a knock on the door brought Mary, the Sheffields' serving girl, into the chamber. Mary is a perky piece of frippery, but I find the serving-girl fashion of wearing the skirts above the ankle a bit disturbing.

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"There's a gentleman below, Mr. Oaks," she said with a movement that could hardly be called a curtsey. "Wants to see Captain Cork, he does."

"You could have saved yourself the stair climb, my girl. You know the Captain is out."

"I told him, sir, but he insists on waiting, and I know my mistress wouldn't want Sweet John Spunton left waiting on the porch."

"*Sweet John* Spunton?" I asked querulously.

"That's what he's called, Mr. Oaks. He's the Margrave's son, sir, Colonel Spunton."

The name sunk into my brain and re-emerged in a more familiar form. Colonel William Spunton was one of the largest landholders in the Southern colonies. A man of immense power, who was often called "Baron Bill" by his detractors.

"Well, in that case, you had better show him up, Mary," I said.

He entered the room a few minutes later, a tall, strikingly handsome fellow of twenty-odd. He had the patrician manner so common to the landed gentry. With some Southern gentlemen, it borders on the imperious, but my visitor carried his quality in an easy-going way.

"Mr. Oaks?" he asked, in the typical pronunciation of the Virginian. I extended my hand and he shook it. "I'm sorry to intrude on you, sir, but I must see Captain Cork. Where can I find him?"

I bid him a seat. "In any of a hundred places. I suggest that you wait here. He should be back around midnight. Perhaps I can help you? I serve as the Captain's financial yeoman, and transact most of his business affairs."

"I'm afraid I have need for Cork's more well-known talents," he said, his voice dropping lower.

He didn't have to tell me more. The sudden change in his eyes and the tightening of the muscles in his face bespoke a demeanour I had seen before. This man was in trouble—trouble so vexing that he needed the services of the most agile mind in the Americas. Yet this situation was uncomfortable for me. Without Cork's ready ears available, I was hesitant to broach the young man's problem. I hid instead in the boskage of small talk.

"Tell me, Mr. Spunton, the serving girl referred to your father as the 'Margrave.' I believe that is a German title. Is your family in the European peerage?"

"No," he smiled sardonically. "We are of the Virginia peerage,

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where power is land, and wealth is measured by the surveyor's chain. God knows we have enough of it—over 200,000 acres."

I *was* impressed. That was formidable acreage.

Spunton went on: "Margrave is an old colonial title. It dates back to the early days when the Cavaliers first came over. It meant that you owned more than 48,000 acres. My father inherited his first 12,000 acres from an uncle, and built it up to 62,000 by head right. The rest was purchased on and off over the years."

"That's interesting. You have a fine education, sir. Inns of Court in London?"

"No, I'm locally planted. William and Mary."

"As I understand it, head right allowed a man to receive fifty acres for every person he brought into the colony, but that was some time back. Your father must be quite elderly."

"Almost seventy-five. My mother was much younger." At the mention of his mother, his newly relaxed face went rigid in tension again.

"I take it your mother has passed on."

"Five days ago. That's why I'm here. I think . . . I know . . . my father murdered her."

If someone had thrust a hot poker in my face, I could not have been more seared with shock. In all my years with Cork, I have heard a litany of horrible crimes, but this, if true, was one of the worst. Yet those same years had taught me to be wary, indeed suspicious, of loose charges often delivered out of well-intentioned, but incorrect assumptions.

"That is a grim charge, Mr. Spunton. On what do you base it?"

The outpouring that followed tested my mettle for discriminating between fact and fancy. Five days ago, Mrs. Spunton had fallen from a second-floor window at the family estate, Spunton Hall. The Hall had been occupied by the elderly Colonel, his wife, who was in her mid-forties, the Spunton sons, John aged 22 and Brace aged 24, their younger sister Carrie, a girl of 18, and twenty house slaves.

The death of the mistress would have been put down to an unfortunate accident had it not been for the presence of Rachel Broom. The Broom girl had come to Spunton Hall six months before to serve as Mrs. Spunton's personal lady-in-waiting. According to John, Rachel was a poorly educated and uncouth woman of 20. She was lax in her duties, insubordinate to her mistress, and ran roughshod over the household.

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"Was she a bondswoman?" I asked. "Sounds like a good thrashing would put her to rights."

"No, Rachel is a freewoman. Her father was a sea captain of my father's acquaintance," John said as he wound down his tale. "My mother complained, but the Colonel turned a deaf ear. Anything Rachel did was tolerable to him. I didn't understand it all until this morning. Then it was clear that my mother was a victim of murder. My father admits he was near my mother's bedroom when she fell to her death. He said she was reaching out to feed a squirrel when she toppled.

"That is plausible, Mr. Oaks. She was a quiet woman who loved animals. We didn't see much of her these past few years. You see, she never got over the death of my youngest brother, Jed, back in '48. She'd spend most of her days sitting in her rooms feeding the small animals and birds that came up to the house."

"Poor woman," I said, "but what turned your thoughts to murder, sir, if her death was plausibly accidental?"

"This morning at breakfast Rachel Broom announced that she was betrothed to my father. Don't you see, he wanted my mother out of the way to marry this—this scullery maid?"

"Did your father confirm her statement?"

"Indeed. My brother Brace and I confronted him, and he indicated it was true. He became enraged when we pressed him. I had heard that Captain Cork was in Williamsburg, and I rode in to seek his help."

Well, by jing, if I was serving as Cork's proxy, I told myself, I might as well think like him.

"Tell me, Mr. Spunton," I said, leaning back in my chair and folding my hands in Cork's manner when interrogating a subject, "where was Rachel Broom at the time of your mother's accident?"

"*Murder,* sir, and you can mark it. I believe she was in her own room. It adjoins my mother's."

"You say you 'believe,' sir, but you don't know. Did your father actually see your mother fall?"

"He said he was passing her doorway when he heard her cry out. He rushed in, but it was too late—at least, that is his story, and I believed it until Rachel's announcement this morning. Now I can see that he was so filled with lust for that witch that he was willing to kill for her."

I have often been critical of the Captain's exercises in criminal investigation, but now, I must confess, I found it most exhilarat-

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ing. In point of fact, it was quite simple, once you got the hang of it.

"Was your mother's bedroom door opened or closed when your father said he heard the scream?"

When John replied that the door was closed, I almost clapped my hands with glee; but, owing to Spunton's obvious grief, I resisted.

"It would seem to me, Mr. Spunton, that you have overlooked a more obvious culprit."

"Who, sir?"

"Rachel Broom herself. If she occupies an adjoining room, she could easily have pushed your mother out the window and scampered back to her own room in a matter of seconds. You must admit that is a much more palatable solution."

"And how do you explain my father offering Rachel marriage just five days after my mother's death? If Rachel is the culprit, he could have known about it. Perhaps it was collusion."

"Not necessarily, sir. You are a young man with many fertile years ahead of you. Your father is an old fellow, and would reach out for feminine comfort in his loss. You said yourself that your mother had been more or less a recluse over the past few years. Well, put yourself in your father's place."

I was grateful when Spunton conceded that I had a valid argument, and I couldn't wait to boast a bit to Cork. That was not forthcoming, however, for it was now past midnight, and the Captain had not yet appeared. Spunton said that he was fatigued from his ride in from the plantation, and decided to get some rest and speak with Cork in the morning. His family maintained a townhouse in Botetourt Street, just around the corner.

I, too, was sleepy, so I left a note asking Cork to waken me on his return. I drifted into slumber, content with my night's work.

It was dawn when I felt the Captain's hand shaking my shoulder. For a man who had been abounding all night, he didn't look the worse for wear. In fact, you would think that he had spent the night sedately in bed.

I am not one to dawdle on awakening. I was on my feet in seconds and relating the Spunton affair. I told him everything young John had told me, and then sat down at the table with a self-satisfied look on my face.

"All we have to do is fetch the authorities and clamp the wench in irons," I said, cupping my kneecaps.

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"Oaks," Cork roared, "you're an ass, a bloody jackanapes. Get dressed! We ride for Spunton Hall within the hour."

"I don't understand, Captain."

"I haven't time to explain. Now move."

"All right," I said, getting into my breeches, "I'll get mounts and pick up John Spunton and be back shortly."

"You can stop by the Spunton townhouse," he said, his face growing dark, "but only to confirm my suspicion that he is no longer there."

John had indeed left, and the Captain and I rode speedily north-west as if to escape the rays of the rising sun.

The thrust of beauty is often blunted when the mind knows that the splendour-in-the-eye is but a façade for some unknown evil. My first view of Spunton Hall, as we entered the plantation's main park, should have taken my breath away, and would have, had I not ridden for some silent hours next to the sullen Cork. The main house, a thousand yards ahead, was framed at the end of an oak-lined drive. It was like a scene on a stage—a stage rimmed with floral footlights aglow with the vitelline warmth of late autumn flowers.

The structure itself was clean-lined and impressive. The architect had let the building's many equally-proportioned-and-spaced windows serve as its chief external ornamentation. It had a steep hipped roof above two full storeys, and the roof was pierced by twelve dormers. Two huge chimneys rose from either end of the house, and, as we drew nearer, the late afternoon sun glinted off the pink brickwork, which was carefully set in courses of Flemish and English bond. It was an architectural masterpiece, and fitted the power of the Margrave.

We reined in at the foot of the porch steps. A thin black child in light blue livery and powdered wig raced up to tend the mounts.

"Is your master to house?" Cork asked him.

"The Many-grave is home, sah."

"And Miss Broom?"

The boy looked up in amazement as Cork dismounted and stood facing him. The Captain is six foot six, but he must have looked twenty feet tall to the child.

"No, sah. She done be dead."

"Hesh. Hesh up, boy," a deep voice said from the main doorway. Its owner was a ramrod-straight black man. He, too, was in livery, but his cotton-white hair was his own. He was a very

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dignified-looking man, and his manner, though quiet, was one of authority.

"May I be of service, sirs?" he asked.

Cork was about to speak when a young woman appeared in the doorway. "Who is it, Uncle Robbie?" she asked.

Her hair was the same yellow as the autumn flowers, and her comely features bespoke her kinship to Sweet John. Carrie Spunton was a true beauty.

We introduced ourselves and she asked us to enter the main hall. She told the butler to show us to the parlour, and went off to inform her father. We were left alone amid the fine English- and French-made furniture, brocade draperies, and walls covered with Chinese silk. The extravagance was lost on me, for I was disheartened over the news of Miss Broom's death.

I slumped onto a divan and looked up at Cork, who was studying a curious red vase. "I sealed that poor girl's doom, didn't I?" I said. "If I had not given John my theory, he wouldn't have sought revenge."

Cork put the vase down, rubbed his barba, and smiled. "Then you are a double jackanapes, my lad. This morning, when I gave you that appellation, I was pricking you for faulty deduction, not for sic-ing John Spunton on like the devil's mad dog. My haste in getting here was on the assumption that there might be another murder, but I couldn't be certain who the victim might be." He stopped when he heard footsteps in the hall. "As Uncle Robbie so colorfully put it, 'Hesh up.' You may see me play the dunce in a few seconds, but follow my trail."

The footsteps stopped at the doorsill, and Colonel William Spunton surveyed us. His face was well lined in the manner of the elderly, and so might be the body beneath the silk shirt and claret waistcoat; but his carriage was boldly erect. If Sweet John and Carrie were his children, they must have favoured their mother. But the young man who stood at his side took after his father as a lead image from a mould. Both Brace Spunton and his father shared the same fierce black eyes, and stern, almost cruel, mouth. There was only one word for this duo, and it was arrogance. The master and the heir apparent were fiercely regal, like the dukes of old.

"Captain Cork." The senior Spunton's voice was surprisingly young and resonant. "Your reputation precedes you, sir. This is my elder son, Brace."

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We shook hands all around, and the Colonel shouted an order to some unseen slave for peach juleps.

"You'll have to forgive my younger son John's running off half-cocked," he said as we sat down around a black lacquered table. "Sweet John's like his mama. Makes for a handsome boy, but a flighty man."

"Yes," Cork said, "I could tell that from Oaks's report. This Broom woman did herself in?"

"Ha! You see, Brace, I told you he was a man of good mind!" The Colonel's hand came down on his son's leg. "Of course, I couldn't believe that Rachel had pushed my wife to her death. I assumed she fell, poor woman. But when Rachel heard that Sweet John had been to see you, she must have panicked. Threw herself from the same window. Now that's poetic justice, eh, lads?"

A young slave entered and put down a silver tray with bottles and goblets on it.

"It is a sad business." Brace spoke for the first time. "If I thought she had killed mama, I swear I would have run Rachel through myself. But God has a way of squaring things."

"Your wife was ill, as I understand it, Colonel," Cork said, accepting a goblet.

The Colonel nodded, but spoke of the julep. "It's the mint that does it. Damnedest combination—peach brandy and mint. But it does have something curious about it."

"Delicious, Colonel," I said. "Almost as tasty as the Captain's Apple Knock."

Cork then had to explain his concoction, which is highly potent.

"Splendid!" the Colonel cried. "You shall make it for us at supper. By the Lord, it's good to have folks in the house again. Haven't had guests since my youngest boy Jed died five years ago. Dang beautiful child. Thrown from a horse. Brace here shot the animal on the spot. My wife came down with what the old mammies call 'the awfuls.' Moody. Kept to herself. I guess the poor thing is better off in heaven with Jed. Emily will be happy there."

"Where is John?" Cork asked. "I was hoping to meet him."

"Asleep," Brace told him. "Came in riding hell-for-leather around sunup. Told us what Mr. Oaks had said. Rachel must have eavesdropped, because she flung herself out of that window a half hour later."

"Well, enough of this morbidity," the Colonel said. "You gentlemen will want a scrub and some rest before dinner."

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Cork quaffed the rest of his drink. "Can we possibly have adjoining rooms, Colonel? Oaks and I sometimes use the night hours for business plans, and we wouldn't want to disturb the household."

Old Spunton furrowed his brows for a moment and then smiled. "There's only my wife's room. The adjoining room was Rachel's. I don't think their things have been moved out, though."

"Perhaps we impose upon the house," Cork said. "We could ride back to—"

Colonel Spunton threw his head back and laughed. "Imposition! Lord, man, you have little knowledge of Southern hospitality. When I first came out here, plantation owners used to haunt the crossroads, looking for guests. There was one fellow, up near York River, used to take 'em at gunpoint. That's how much he wanted people around him. My wife's daddy once had guests just for overnight, and they stayed until their second child was born. Stay, sir, the house is yours."

I had finished my bath and was astonished that my linens had been washed and dried and my clothes brushed. I dressed and popped my head into Cork's room. He was hastily going through the late Mrs. Spunton's clothes closets.

"I know you played on the Colonel's pride to get us the rooms occupied by the mistress and Rachel Broom, but don't you think you will arouse suspicion if a servant comes in?"

"Just a cursory look for now, Oaks. We'll have to wait till tonight for a minute examination."

"I didn't think you were taken in by this suicide fancy, but whom do you suspect?"

"All of them."

"A conspiracy?"

"No, each one is highly motivated and had probable opportunity in Rachel's death. The wife's death is more perplexing."

"Couldn't part of my original assessment stand? Rachel killed her mistress to replace her and one of the Spuntons took revenge?"

He had abandoned the closets and was busy at a writing desk and the contents of its drawer. He spread several items out upon the desktop. They were a miniature portrait of an extremely handsome woman, a seal ring, a snuff box, and an ivory pipe.

"What do you think, Oaks?" he asked.

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"You are testing me again, aren't you? Well, let me try my hand. The miniature looks like Carrie, but from the costume, I take it to be Mrs. Spunton. The ring is a family memento, and the pipe—you think you have me there, don't you? Well, I'm not that obtuse. I am supposed to say that the pipe is the Colonel's, but I know these Southern women smoke a bowl or two. I remember a lady of your acquaintance in North Carolina who blatantly smoked these seegars you're so fond of."

"Well, done, Oaks. Don't be dismayed by foul habits. These people make their living from tobacco. Proximity, or rather availability, spurs usage."

There was a soft rap on the door, and Cork quickly replaced the items in the drawer. Uncle Robbie entered and announced dinner.

In the course of our adventures, Cork and I have supped under all conditions—by campfire, in rude tree-line cabins, and in the finest houses of New York and Philadelphia; yet nothing could match the exotic splendour of dinner at Spunton Hall.

Our arrival had altered the regular dinner schedule, which was normally at three o'clock, but the food did not suffer from the delay.

We were seated facing the two Spunton sons. The Colonel and Carrie sat at opposite ends of the long table. Behind each chair was a footman in full uniform. They were silent and efficient under the direction of Uncle Robbie. The Margrave may have been the master, but there was no doubt that young Carrie was the mistress of the plantation. I supposed that during the years of her mother's seclusion, she had filled her place, and she now handled it with grace and subtle charm.

The table was lined with lace cloth, and there was damask underneath. While the Colonel carved a saddle of mutton, Carrie ladled black bean soup and pork bits from a tureen of East India china. Considering the recent tragedy in the house, the conversation was remarkably light and cheerful.

The mutton and soup were delicious, and when finished the plates were removed and others quickly put in their place.

"Now, sirs, I have a treat for you," the Colonel said, as Uncle Robbie refilled his goblet with champagne. "Owing to your visit, I have asked my little Carrie to have a preserve of fowle made in your honour."

I had no idea what he was talking about, and when the kitchen servant carried in a large turkey on a silver platter, I put the

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Colonel's enthusiasm down to pride in his daughter. However, when the turkey was cut in transverse sections and served, I marvelled at the plate of morsels before me.

"Pray, Miss Carrie," I said, savouring the meat, "this is most curious. I first taste turkey, and then I swear it's goose."

Carrie's eyes sparkled above the white of her teeth as she laughed. "Mr. Oaks, you have a tongue for taste, sir. What else do you find?"

I could see it was a game, and that she loved a tease.

"Duck," Sweet John said, "definitely duck."

"A star for you, Sweet John darling. How about my other brother?"

Brace was the most sombre of the party. "Just turkey," he said, and went on eating.

"Oh, pooh. You're a wretch, Brace boy. Daddy, your turn."

The old man winked at her. "You can't fool me, you minx, there's capon, too."

Carrie clapped her hands. "Now you, Captain Cork. Daddy says you have a head for solving things."

"Dove, to be sure, Miss Carrie, and, let's see." He took another forkful as the girl watched him intently with anxious glee. "Don't tell me now," he said, and she giggled. "Now, let me see, this feast is much like some of my cases. All the elements are here. The trick is to identify them. So you started with a dove and stuffed it into a guinea hen. Then into a duck, and the duck into a capon, and that into a goose, and then into a turkey."

Carrie clapped her hands again. "You missed one, sir, you missed one!"

"You see," Cork said to us all, "it *is* like my cases. I haven't found the missing ingredient."

"Partridge!" Carrie Spunton was overcome with triumph. "I've put you up a stump, Captain."

"To be sure, ma'am, but I have been up there before. However, eventually I manage to get down. It's just a matter of time until I find the missing ingredient."

We finished the preserve of fowle to much laughter. This course was followed by a plum pudding, tarts, and brandied peaches. Then the damask was removed, and we continued small talk over figs, raisins, almonds, and madeira.

Later, having excused ourselves, we retired to our rooms, me to digest and Cork to ponder.

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"You are not satisfied, are you?" I asked the Captain.

"I told you to follow my dunce's trail, and you did so admirably. No, I don't believe that Rachel Broom committed suicide out of remorse for having murdered Mrs. Spunton. The case offers a strange mixture of motives."

"The children wanting Rachel dead is certainly strong. Carrie doesn't appear to be the type to give up her mistress-ship to Rachel, and both John and Brace had a great deal to lose if the Colonel had married her and she produced another son."

He nodded. "But how can you reconcile the mother's death? Certainly the children had nothing to gain from her death. Which leaves us with Rachel and the Colonel."

"Then we have come full circle," I said.

"Not quite. Colonel Spunton is no fool. He—" Cork was interrupted by a knock at the door, and Colonel Spunton himself entered, looking less merry than he had been at dinner.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said. "I remembered that my wife's Bible was in here. Since she died, I have taken to reading myself to sleep. Ah, there it is." He picked up the Good Book and caressed the soft leather cover.

"Odd, isn't it?" he said in a tired voice. "My Emily was always after me to read the good word with her, and now that she is gone, it is my only consolation."

"She must have been a beautiful woman," Cork said, picking up the miniature. "You'll forgive me, I found this while looking for some writing paper."

The old man took the picture and looked at it lovingly. "No older than Carrie when she first came to the Hall as a bride. She was such a fragile creature—so like the little creatures she fed each day."

"Was your wife's illness melancholia, Colonel?"

"Yes, you might say that. Each of us has his little ways." He walked over to the window and looked out at the gathering dusk. "I'm going to have this damnable portal walled in to-morrow. I'm sorry that my wife's things are still in this room. I don't like shrines. I told Rachel to pack up Emily's things, but she never got around to it."

"Colonel." Cork joined him at the window. "Perhaps Oaks misunderstood your son last night, but he said something about you having been betrothed to Rachel."

"A complete misunderstanding, I assure you, Captain. John is a

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good lad, but impetuous. Rachel was not a bad sort, a bit unpolished, but basically a nice girl."

"And this misunderstanding?"

"Youth has a way of hearing only what they want to hear. Two days after Emily's accident, I was talking to Rachel and said something about the void in my life and that I was counting on her to fill it. I guess the girl took that as an offer of marriage."

"I see, but wouldn't filling that void with Rachel be a snub to Miss Carrie? She certainly is the apple of her father's eye."

"Applecore, meat, pips, and skin, sir. But don't be taken in by Carrie's guileless ways. She inherits 50,000 acres from her mother directly, and a fine house in Clarewick. She loves me dearly, but I fear she will be off to be her own mistress shortly. Southern women are not as dependent and helpless as they appear."

"Nor women anywhere," Cork said. "I have always been clinically interested in melancholia, Colonel. It's a strange disease that may take manifest forms. Was your wife under a doctor's care?"

"Not lately. Dr. Gordon rode out from Williamsburg several times a few years back, but he said that physically there was nothing wrong with her. And now I am quite tired, gentlemen, if you'll excuse me."

"Of course," Cork said, crossing to the door to open it. "Will Rachel's remains be sent on to her family?"

The Colonel stopped at the doorsill and turned to Cork. "Who told you she had a family?"

"All of us do, at some time, sir."

"She had only her father, who went down with his ship, the *Bonnie Marie,* last spring. That's why she came to live here. You'll forgive me, but I do not care to talk any more about the Broom girl. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir. Oh, by the way, Colonel, a personal request, since we will be leaving in the morning. What perfume did your wife use? This room has an intoxicating smell—so sweet, and yet it is too late in the year for magnolia or honeysuckle, so I assume it is her scent. If I could have the name, I'm sure it would please a lady friend of my acquaintance."

"Probably sachet. I have no knowledge of ladies' toilettes, Captain. Good-night."

Cork had me up at dawn, and we found the cookhouse already abustle under the direction of Uncle Robbie.

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"Colonel said you would be leaving, gentlemen," the black man said, with no trace of sadness at our departure. "They'll be eggs, slab pork, and grits ready right soon."

Cork nodded and took a seat at one of the rude slave tables. His acquiescence to eat was a Godsend for me, because I do not like to travel on an empty stomach, and I had feared from Cork's agitated mood on awakening that we would be condemned to a long, hungry ride back to Williamsburg.

Uncle Robbie served the plates himself. "I trust you'll enjoy it in health, gentlemen."

"Tell me, Uncle Robbie," Cork said as he sliced some bread, "you appear to have some book learning."

"Master Jim always said he wanted good talk around Miss Emily, so he had the preacher learn me."

"Master Jim?"

"Mrs. Spunton's daddy, Captain. Master Jim Leigh, sir. A fine man." The slave's smoky eyes squinted hard. "Belong to the Leighs, sir. Come here with Miss Emily when she married the Colonel. Old Master Jim said, 'Robbie, you go over there and take care of my girl, and see that no harm come.' Now she's gone, and looks like Miss Carrie is going back to Leigh Hall, and me with her."

"It must have been sad for you, Mrs. Spunton falling to her death that way."

"What's done is done. The Lord has her now."

"And Rachel Broom as well, eh?"

"She's not with the Lord, Captain Cork. That's a surety."

Cork might have pursued the subject further, but he was cut off by the slave's sudden departure. We were just finishing our breakfast when the stable boy, who had greeted us yesterday, came in to tell us our horses were ready.

We cantered down the main drive until we had come a few hundred yards. Cork reined up for a moment and turned in his saddle for a final look at Spunton Hall.

"Is that the end of it?" I asked, a bit dejected. "Is the case a stone wall?"

"No. Much like Carrie's fowle preserve, I have all the elements identified, but they are not yet in their proper order."

"What next, then?"

"First, we have to prove an assumption, and then find one thousand men."

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"One thousand men!" I found myself saying it to the flank of Cork's mount, as he broke into a gallop towards Williamsburg.

Dr. Gordon's house was on Scotland Street, just off Boundary Street. He was a fussy little man with quick nervous hands and a breathless way of speaking that gave you the impression that he was rushing from crisis to crisis.

"Mrs. Spunton—the Margrave's wife—oh, yes, yes. Very sick woman—most ill." He was fidgeting with papers on his desk.

"I believe you told the Colonel that there was nothing physically wrong with her."

"Physically? Organically—well, no, Captain. More in the mind and heart, you know. Broken-hearted over her son's death. Seen cases like it before. Nothing one can do."

"Would you say she had a demeanour of malaise?"

"Oh, yes, yes."

"But did she appear to be unhappy? Sadness and tears?"

"No. More like living in another world. I think she was dwelling quite happily within herself. She—ah—stopped time, as it were. And speaking of time, I have little to spare, gentlemen. I must be off."

And so were we. The Royal Palace was only two blocks away, so we walked.

"The good doctor didn't make much sense, but he seemed to have corroborated what we already knew about Emily Spunton."

"Dr. Gordon is a fool," Cork snarled. "Or at least limited in his observation. Well, at least the assumption is proved, and now for the thousand men."

These are the times in which I could strangle Cork without regret. He was closing in on a solution, and yet he kept it entirely to himself. There had been a time when I took his silence, as he stalked the denouement, to be necessary to his concentration. Now I know that was nonsense. He just enjoys dangling me on a string.

He had scrawled a hasty note before we left Dr. Gordon's office, and, on arriving at the Governor's palace, he had it carried within by a footman.

Ten minutes later, a scholarly gentleman with a balding head appeared and announced that he was the Clerk of Records, and had been instructed by the Governor's secretary to extend us every courtesy. For the next two hours, Cork not only accepted the courtesy, he abused it unmercifully.

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The Clerk of Records, whose name was Fowler, was not a spry man, but this did not deter Cork. He had him climbing ladders in the cellar vaults, and toting massive ledgers to a small candlelit table. The poor man looked near exhaustion before Cork sat back and smiled.

"The greatest gift to mankind is the written word, Oaks, but putting it to record-keeping is without doubt its supreme moment." Old Fowler beamed. "Now, Mr. Fowler, would you be good enough to fetch me a quill and paper? Oaks, go on to the Raleigh Tavern and send back any young fellow who wishes to earn a purse for a long ride. I'll join you at the Tavern for an early supper."

All was ready when Cork arrived at the Raleigh. A joint of beef was almost off the spit, and terrapin stew was bubbling.

"Do you plan to keep this case secret?" I asked him as he drew out a chair and sat down.

"From most society, yes. But justice will be served if all turns out as I expect."

"Well, tell me one thing. Did I seal Rachel Broom's fate when I deduced she could have killed Mrs. Spunton, and informed Sweet John?"

"I told you before, no. Rachel sealed her own doom. The problem with this case was that it had too many murders and too many motives. Let's take the murders first. Mrs. Spunton wasn't murdered. Opium smokers have a way of losing their bearings."

"Opium smokers? But how—"

"The ivory pipe and the cloying smell in her room indicated it. Dr. Gordon's statements that she 'had stopped time' and was happy were merely euphoria. Perhaps we were too hard on the doctor. Opium-smoking is a rare sight outside of the Orient."

"But Colonel Spunton *could* have killed her for Rachel."

"Nonsense. A man of his wealth can have a dozen mistresses, and still keep a wife. A recluse at that, giving little trouble. No, no one had anything to gain by her death except Carrie, and it is inconceivable that she would have killed her mother for her estate."

"All right, but suppose one of the Spuntons believed Rachel killed their mother. The wedding announcement would make it seem that there was collusion between Rachel and the Colonel."

"One-sided collusion, Oaks. I asked myself what possible hold Rachel could have had over old Spunton to get a betrothal out of

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him. That's where I had to use some arithmetic."

"The one thousand men, eh? That's still a mystery to me. Something in the records you went through this afternoon?"

"The records confirmed it. Now, what weapon could the daughter of a poor ship captain use against a powerful aristocrat?"

"That he killed his wife."

"Oaks, you are a vexation. We have concluded that Mrs. Spunton's death was an accident. Now, review in your mind your initial conversation with John Spunton. What is the source of power and wealth in these parts?"

"Land."

"But John told you that his father inherited only 12,000 acres and built it up to 62,000 by head right."

"Yes?"

"Arithmetic, man, use your great love of sums! If a man got fifty acres of free land for each person brought into the county by head right, where are the men? Divide 50,000 additional acres by 50, and you have to account for one thousand new immigrants. Where are they?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," I said.

"Rachel Broom knew. Her father must have told her his secret, and she used it to blackmail Spunton."

"I admit that one thousand people don't just disappear. Perhaps they went into the hills."

"Perhaps. But the records don't show that. They do show that the *Bonnie Marie* was Spunton's main carrier for immigrants, and that she made port four times a year over a ten-year period. That would mean twenty-five passengers per trip. Packed to the gunnels, the *Bonnie Marie* could not have carried over ten passengers. Moreover, her bills of lading reveal that each passage she was also stowed tight with hard goods."

"So the land grants were made out on people who didn't exist."

"They had to exist. The people had to stand before a magistrate in the flesh and blood."

"Then how?"

"The crew, Oaks, the crew. When the *Bonnie Marie* made port, her crew came ashore and were logged in as Spunton immigrants. Then they went back on board for the return trip to whatever port and there they found themselves discharged and a new crew put on. Captain Broom himself appears as a Spunton immigrant on one of the trips, which caps it."

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"And when the *Bonnie Marie* went down, Rachel Broom forced the Colonel to take her in."

"And when Mrs. Spunton fell to her death, she saw her chance to be the new mistress of the Hall. A scandal in bogus land grants would destroy Spunton's honour. I believe he agreed at first, and then saw the folly of it. Blackmailers never stop at one bite; they go on until they have everything—in this instance, possibly the disinheritance of Brace and John."

The joint was served, and I sliced off a piece. "Well, I admit it makes sense, Captain, but as you are always so fond of pointing out to me, conjecture is not proof."

"We'll have that by morning," he said, helping himself to more stew.

I guess it was technically morning, although I consider two A.M. the middle of the night. I rose from my bed to the knock on our door, and saw Cork admitting the young lad I had hired as a rider that afternoon. He was worn and breathless from hard galloping, and Cork shoved him into a chair and poured him some wine.

"Thank you, Captain," he said, after a deep swallow. "I near rode the horse into the earth. I gave the Margrave your note and he read it. Then he looked at me with tired eyes and handed the note back to me. 'I'll trust you to return this to Captain Cork,' he said, and, by God, he walked into the next room and put a pistol ball through his head. He's dead, sir."

When the lad had left, Cork held the note over the candle flame and watched it consume itself.

"So you sent him your findings," I said.

"I sent him a conjecture, and he returned it with proof. He may have been a land swindler, Oaks, but the Margrave was also a gentleman."

"Q"

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a NEW short-short by

PRONZINI and WALLMANN

Kenton was out on parole and he had to watch his step. But that sleek, graceful Lancelot II he passed every day—would it prove irresistible? . . .

ONCE A THIEF

by BILL PRONZINI and JEFFREY WALLMANN

What I was doing, standing there in the shadow of a large oak at 4:00 A.M. on this clear moonlit morning, was considering the heist of a car. Not just any car, mind you, but a beautiful three-litre Lancelot Mark II, sitting in a secluded driveway less than a block away. The street—long and dark and deserted—was a veritable tunnel of oaks, and the houses were nicely spaced apart. It was, as we say, a perfect setup.

But I was still only considering. Car-thugging had been my trade for roughly half of my adult life; however, the other half has been spent in an assortment of state-maintained resorts run for the care and preservation of breeds such as myself. If I were to follow the mandates of my craft and once again be caught—well, the parting words of Warden Selkirk, when I was paroled from State Prison recently, were still heavy in my mind:

"Kenton, you're a loser, a perennial fixture here at The Camp. Much as I hate to say it, I'm afraid it won't be long before you're back with us again—for an even longer stay."

Nevertheless, I had been on the straight-and-narrow up until now. With the help of Feeney, my parole officer, I had gotten a worthwhile job as swing-shift dishwasher at the El Rancho Truck Stop and I had a room over the All-Nite Bowling Lanes; and saving bus fare the way I was, I would soon have a color television set. Maybe I shouldn't have scrimped on the fare, though, for walking to

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work brought me past the Lancelot every morning. And every morning I had been finding it harder and harder to continue walking and not driving.

You had to see that Lancelot to appreciate it. Sweet graceful lines, genuine leather throughout, crushed-velvet door panels, combination short wave and cassette mounted in the console, air conditioning, and power everything. The potential joy of wheeling it to Honest Jack's Auto Emporium, where it would receive a brand-new identity and eventually a brand-new home, made the palms of my hands itch.

Well, I was still trying to make up my mind—the Lancelot or another running of my personal gauntlet—when the kid appeared. He was on the sidewalk beyond the Mark II, moving with a kind of awkward stealth, looking furtively around him. When he reached the driveway he darted along it to where the Lancelot was parked. I could see him clearly in the moonlight—young, thin, scared, dressed in black—and I could see the bent wire he was clutching in one hand.

I recognized both the look of him and the wire. I had had the same on my first heist those many years ago, the venture which had sent me down the broad path of crime. I saw the kid bend at the driver's door—and suddenly I knew I had to stop him. Before I could ponder this decision, I was hurrying silently away from the oak and down the sidewalk.

The kid was so intent on maneuvering the wire, which had formerly been a coat hanger, through the Lancelot's wing window that he didn't hear me at all. I eased up directly behind him and let my hand drop heavily onto his shoulder. "Son," I said in a low voice, "you're in trouble."

He turned, cringing. "Who—who are you?"

"Officer Stanislausky of the Special Citizen's Patrol," I said. "It's my job to watch this affluent neighborhood to make sure nobody heists iron belonging to the taxpayers."

"I—I wasn't going to steal this car."

"You were looking for a place to take a nap, maybe?"

"I just got a thing for Lancelots, that's all."

"That I can appreciate," I said. "But the fact remains, you're caught red-handed. I'm duty-bound to take you in."

"Give me a break, mister," the kid said. "I got a widowed mother to support, and if I'm arrested I'll lose my job."

"A widowed mother?"

"And a baby sister," he said.

"Well," I said, "that's a dif-

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ferent story," even though I had used such a story myself on occasion. But he looked like a decent kid, just a little mixed up in his thinking.

"You mean, you'll let me go?" he said.

"Why not? I once supported a widowed mother, too."

"Thanks, mister—thanks!"

"You'll never try to heist another car?"

"Never!"

"Then you're now released on probation," I said, and let go of his shoulder. He gave me a weak grin, backed off two steps, then turned and ran down the driveway and out of sight along the oak-walled sidewalk.

I looked at the house to see if anyone had been aroused, but it was still dark and quiet. Then I looked at the Lancelot. The palms of my hands began to itch again, and I felt a weakness in the pit of my stomach. I began to shake. The Lancelot was so sleek, so beautiful—

And all at once I realized that I hadn't stopped the kid only for humanitarian reasons, that I had intervened partly because he was about to heist the Lancelot, *my* Lancelot. I knew then that I had to have it; I couldn't control myself any longer, the urge was too strong. Some men are born to write books and some to shape the destinies of the world; I was born to heist cars. There is no denying the inevitable.

The kid had left his bent coat hanger in the wing window. I touched it, almost nostalgically, and began to maneuver it. The old magic was still in my fingers. The door opened soundlessly under my hand and I slipped in behind the wheel. I ran my palms over the soft leather upholstery. Honest Jack was going to love this baby. Honest Jack had an eye for fine quality. He did not give new identities to anything but the best from both sides of the Atlantic.

I leaned down under the dash and began to cross the ignition wires. I didn't need a light—a craftsman works mainly by touch alone. As soon as I had her hot-wired, I would get out and roll the Lancelot gently into the street. Then—

The door was suddenly jerked open and the brilliant white light of a flash beam filled the Lancelot's interior. I sat up, blinking, and heard a sharp authoritative voice say, "Hold it right there. Put your hands where I can see them."

I put my hands where he could see them. The flashlight lowered slightly, and beyond the hazy glare was a big guy in a pair of pajamas. In his other hand he held an automatic, and it was very steady. He said, "So

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you were trying to steal my car, eh?"

I sighed resignedly. Under the circumstances there was no point in trying to bluff it out; the proverbial egg was all over my face. "I couldn't control the urge," I said. "I have never been able to control the urge."

"In other words you're a professional car thief."

"Reformed professional car thief—until just now."

"I thought so," the guy said. "I saw the way you got rid of that kid and the quick smooth way you opened the car."

In spite of the situation I felt a touch of pride. "How did you know something was going on out here?" I asked him.

"I was raiding the refrigerator," he answered, "and I happened to look through the kitchen window when the kid started up the drive. I got my gun and went out through the back door and by that time you were here and talking to him. I knew you weren't what you claimed to be, so I just hid in the shrubbery to see what you were up to."

I sighed again. Would the local police and my parole board understand about birthrights and uncontrollable urges? Somehow I didn't think so; they had been singularly unimpressed in the past. Well, maybe Warden Selkirk could arrange for me to have my old cell back. It had a nice view of the exercise yard.

"I tried to go straight," I told the guy philosophically. "I tried not to break my parole. But fate is a fickle woman, as the writers say. I guess I belong in the slammer, all right."

He lowered the flashlight, and the nose of the gun dipped as well. He was smiling—a sly and calculating smile. "Not necessarily," he said.

All that took place three months ago, and I can hardly believe what has happened to me since. I have moved into a posh residential apartment building called the Nabob Arms, and have acquired the color television set and a car of my own—not a Lancelot, but quality merchandise nonetheless. And Dolores, this very buxom blonde I met in the park a while back, has consented to become Mrs. Harold Kenton when her divorce is final.

Everything is coming up roses for the first time in my life, particularly and primarily because I am now able to pursue my calling on an average of six times a week—the heisting of iron, the finest of iron from both sides of the Atlantic. Bliss, sheer bliss. Oh, I don't get as much per as I did from Honest Jack, but I have to look at it

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from the volume and organizational aspects, not to mention the safety standpoint.

I know what you're thinking: the owner of the Lancelot happened to be the ringleader of a large-scale hot-car outfit, and he liked my style enough to take me into the fold.

But you're wrong. And that is the beauty part. What I'm doing, you see, is perfectly legitimate. The owner of the Lancelot is one of this community's most respected citizens, a shrewd business type who recognizes talent when he sees it. His name is Potter, Lawrence D. Potter, of Potter's Repossessions, Inc., and we work for only the best banks and new-car dealers when their paper turns sour, when their car loans are in default.

Like my parole officer, Feeney, says, "It's a modern Horatio Alger success story, if ever there was one."

"Q"

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a *NEW* police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

The gang on the Homicide Squad could promote themselves an occasional lunch, and maybe once in a while get a radio or something wholesale, but anything more than that in the way of graft and they'd be off the squad in a hurry and assigned to special duty checking sewers for the Water Department. Inspector Mitch Taylor knew all that, but you know Mitch—he was always stretching his luck . . .

V AS IN VENGEANCE

by LAWRENCE TREAT

The first time around, there in the squad room, Inspector Mitch Taylor didn't particularly listen to that vandalism report. It was just one of those items Lieutenant Bill Decker ticked off at the regular morning briefing. It was precinct stuff, they were handling it. The only reason the lieutenant mentioned it was, the Homicide Squad had jurisdiction over all crimes of violence, and a stink bomb was violence all right, even when nobody got hurt and the restaurant owner didn't want to do anything about it.

Anyhow, the whole business was about as important to Mitch as a raindrop on a wet umbrella, and it would have stayed put in the bottom of his mind except that kid of his went and ruined the couch. What Joey did was, he had those brand-new spikes and he kept them on while he was in the house. He must have been roughhousing around and he tried to jump over the couch or something, only he fell and his spikes got caught in the upholstery. And the way he ripped it up, you wouldn't believe unless you saw it.

Amy blew up sky-high and she was just about ready to whack the kid, except when she saw the bruise he had from his fall, she went soft and put him

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to bed and wrapped him up in boric-acid bandages. Which helped Joey all right, but didn't do much about fixing up the couch.

After Joey went to sleep, Mitch and Amy talked it over. Mitch didn't want to punish the kid too hard, he'd learned his lesson. Maybe they ought to dock his allowance for a while—say they knocked off twenty-five cents a week for a couple of months, which would come to around two bucks.

"How much we got in that savings account of ours?" Mitch said.

"About fifty dollars, plus interest."

"Well, we'll use that for a starter," Mitch said.

"For a starter?" Amy said. "Mitchell, do you know what things cost these days? I can do the work myself, but any material worth using is going to cost at least ten dollars a yard, maybe more. And we need twenty yards."

"Two hundred bucks!" Mitch said. Then he remembered the stink bomb and how some fabric place had been vandalized about the same time, along with a minor sabotage job at an auto place. So suppose Mitch got to the bottom of the trouble at the fabric place and then they wanted to thank him. No reason why things couldn't work out with him getting a couch cover for free, or for peanuts anyhow.

He didn't say anything to Amy about it, but his mind began churning around. It was pretty clear he couldn't tell the lieutenant straight off what he was after. Still, he had to get the lieutenant's okay, if only in case Mitch ran into something and needed help. Besides, you didn't just take off and decide to run an investigation all by yourself. Not on the Homicide Squad. So what with this and that, things were touchy.

Next day, after the lieutenant had finished up with the morning session and there was nothing in particular to get excited about, Mitch went into Decker's cubbyhole of an office. There Mitch sat down on the wooden chair that nobody'd ever managed to get all the splinters out of.

"Boss," Mitch said, "you remember that stink bomb up at the restaurant? McCabe's, wasn't it?"

Decker nodded. "So?"

"I been thinking about it. That auto agency up on Lincoln had a couple of cars with their tires got slashed. Happened around the same time, and then there was a fabric place where some material got sliced up. I got a feeling there's a connection."

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The lieutenant leaned back in his swivel chair and let it squeak a little. Then he rolled up a couple of wads of paper and eyed the stuffed crocodile across the room. But instead of aiming at it, he picked the trash basket near the window, tried twice, and missed both times. So it looked like the lieutenant knew Mitch had an angle somewhere, but the lieutenant couldn't figure out exactly what.

"Perrini, up in the Eighth," Decker said, "would have the lowdown, wouldn't he?"

"Maybe," Mitch said. "But it's funny how sometimes you get hung up on stuff that doesn't look like much."

"From where I sit," Decker said, "I'd say McCabe was having some labor trouble, and that was about it."

"Looks that way," Mitch said, "except there's the auto place. And then that fabric shop, too."

"So what do you want to do?"

"I dunno," Mitch said. "Maybe have a little talk."

"With the three of them?"

"Why not?" Mitch said. "Just so I don't get Perrini's Irish up."

"Go ahead," the lieutenant said. "See what you can dig up."

So Mitch had a green light, and he dropped in on the car place and didn't get anywheres. A guy by the name of Dupuis ran it, and while Mitch didn't exactly fall in love with him, there was no reason to put on the pressure.

And the same pretty much went for McCabe, where it just happened Mitch got to the restaurant around lunchtime. McCabe said maybe Mitch would like to have something to eat, which was okay with Mitch. McCabe sat down with him for a while, and you didn't need a Ph.D. to tell you he knew his way around. Mitch mentioned the stink bomb and McCabe said the precinct boys had looked into it and decided it was probably some crackpot that just liked to make a ruckus.

About then Mitch spotted Charlie Frank, from the Eighth, walking in. McCabe excused himself, went over to Charlie, and spoke to him for a minute or two, then patted him on the shoulder and handed him an envelope.

Charlie was getting himself his weekly paycheck, that was for sure. Mitch wondered how much it was and whether Charlie would have gone right to that fabric place and mentioned a few violations, and then asked for some upholstery material. Mitch could have done the same thing, but the Homicide Squad didn't go in for

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that kind of cookery. You could promote yourself a lunch, and maybe once in a while you could get a radio or something wholesale, but anything more than that, you'd be off the Homicide Squad and assigned to special duty checking sewers for the Water Department.

McCabe came back to Mitch and excused himself. McCabe said he had business upstairs, but any time Mitch wanted to come around for a meal, just make himself at home. Mitch said sure, thanks for the lunch, and he watched McCabe walk off. After that Mitch finished his coffee and signaled for the waiter. Mitch asked a couple of questions about the stink bomb, and the waiter went into a play-by-play account that Mitch hardly bothered listening to.

The thing was, Mitch hadn't really come here to find anything out except whether that bomb was part of some labor trouble, and it obviously wasn't. Whatever the reason, McCabe was eating his turkey, feathers and all, and Mitch was ready to bet that McCabe and the auto guy and maybe the fabric place were getting hit by the same shillelagh.

After lunch Mitch dropped over at the Eighth. Charlie Frank had come back from making his rounds, and he was feeling good. He and Mitch chewed the fat a little and Mitch asked about the stink bomb, and Charlie shrugged it off.

"Just one of those things," he said. "Sometimes you don't want to take the cork out of the bottle, if you know what I mean."

Mitch did. He was pretty sure there were a few things Charlie could have told him, but Mitch didn't want to push the wrong button on account you never knew what it would light up or where it would get you. So Mitch asked about the fabric place, which was also in the Eighth, and Charlie said he hadn't bothered much with it. Guy by the name of Raeburn ran it, and you could have him. He'd had some goods hacked up, and when you came to investigate, he told you to go get the hell out, so what kind of a guy was he, anyhow?

Mitch said, "Yeah." He told Charlie to watch himself and keep his weight down, and then Mitch left and drove over to the fabric place.

It was one of those high-class joints with a canopy over the sidewalk and the name in fancy letters that you could hardly read—*Fabrics & Fashions, Inc.* Mitch slowed up and thought about parking double and decided against it. When he spotted the alleyway where de-

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liveries were made, he turned into it, because most of the time you can learn a lot more by going in the back door.

The alleyway took him into a parking area with a loading platform and space for three cars, with the lines marked off and a name in front of each of them. There was Mr. Raeburn and Mr. Karski and Mr. Jones, and just for luck Mitch jotted down the license-plate numbers of the three cars, along with the number on a fourth car drawn up alongside the loading platform.

It didn't take much police experience to guess that the guy on the platform was no shipping clerk and no truck driver and didn't belong here in the first place. Because he was dressed like a salesman and he was having a lot of trouble lifting a couple of heavy packages. He'd just rolled them out to the platform and now he was dragging them along, a foot at a time, then sliding them into the trunk of his car, then standing up to catch his breath.

Mitch cut his ignition and left his car in the alley, so's to block it off. Then he got out and walked up to the guy.

"Taking that somewheres?" Mitch asked.

The guy looked nervous, but not nervous enough. "What's it to you?" he said.

Mitch took out his identification. "Taylor, Homicide," he said. "So where you taking that stuff?"

The guy kind of sniffled, took out a pack of cigarettes, then stuck it back in his pocket. His hands were trembling and his voice came out in a croak. "Me?" he said. "Nowheres."

"That's for sure," Mitch said. "You got a salesslip or a shipping ticket or something? Because people don't just walk out of the shipping department with big packages like that."

"I—I was just loading it."

"What's your name?"

"Verber. Eddie Verber."

"Let's you and me go see Mr. Raeburn. I got a feeling he'd like to know about this."

It began to size up like a real break for Mitch. Here he'd started out on a fishing expedition, nothing solid in his mind, and he ran into what looked like a small-time heist. He'd bring this Verber up to Raeburn and tell him what had happened, and Raeburn would thank Mitch and probably say there'd been a lot of pilfering going on and now the thing was out in the open. Then he'd ask Mitch if there was anything he could do to show his gratitude. And Mitch would have an answer to that.

If Verber wasn't any too anxious to go up to Raeburn's of-

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fice, Verber didn't have much choice. They went up the back stairs, pushed open a fire door, and came into a room where a female was typing away while another one was pulling out drawers from one of the filing cabinets that took up the whole of one wall. Just around the time Mitch showed, the door from an inner office opened up and this guy came lumbering out like a fullback hitting the line.

You could tell right off that he ran the joint. He was a big watery man with a lower lip that looked as if it was going to drop off. Whether he was flabby all the way through or was just upholstered on the outside was something you didn't know until you saw him lift up a bolt of cloth like it was a slice of styrofoam.

He came out of the office talking and he kept on talking like an auctioneer practising his spiel. He didn't even slow up when he switched from his secretary to Verber and then over to Mitch. Mitch identified himself while the guy picked up a phone and straightened out something or other with somebody who was buying or selling or maybe both.

"Verber here," Mitch said, pointing, "was walking off with some stuff, and whether he was supposed to or not, I couldn't tell. Only it didn't look on the level, so I brought him up here to find out."

"Mr. Verber," Raeburn said, and he slowed up to bang his words harder into Mitch's skull, "is an employee of mine, and whatever he does is in accordance with my orders. Is that clear?"

"Mr. Raeburn," Mitch said, and he could see twenty yards of Amy's couch covering getting pulled away from him, "as a police officer, I try to help out, and when I see somebody—"

"Help out!" Raeburn said, and he shifted back to his auctioneer tempo. "If you'd lock up a few thugs and a few muggers and make the streets safe so that taxpayers and other citizens wouldn't have to doublelock their doors at night and have their insurance rates doubled and tripled because of the increase in crime, which is a national scandal, and if this country is to survive its present crisis it will be because people learn to mind their own business, which is what I wish you'd do. Dora, get me that Enfield file. And furthermore—what the hell is your name?"

"Taylor. And what I came for is about some trouble you had here a couple weeks ago when—"

"We had no trouble," Raeburn said, "and we have no

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trouble now, so if you'll get out of here, I'll appreciate the courtesy."

"Look," Mitch said. "Before you get really het up, maybe you'll tell me why Mr. Verber was carting out all that—"

"Mr. Taylor," Raeburn said, "I pay taxes and I hand in reports on how much I make and how much I pay my people. I pay federal income tax and state income tax and sales tax and social security and workingmen's compensation, but so far nobody ever tried to tell me how to handle my employees. I appreciate your zeal, even though it was mistaken, but I'll handle the matter myself. You know your way out, don't you?"

"Okay," Mitch said. "No harm done and any time you're in a jam, just get in touch with me. Taylor, Homicide." And Mitch started out. He stuck his hand in his pocket to get his car keys, but he managed to drop them, which gave him time to turn around and see Raeburn put his hand on Verber's shoulder, sort of friendly-like, and say, "Don't take it so hard, Eddie. Come in my office and we'll sit down and talk."

The loading platform downstairs was empty, and Eddie Verber's car was still alongside it with the trunk compartment open and the big package half in and half out. The wrapping was torn and Mitch could see what was inside. It was a heavy greenish-yellow material with a pebbled effect, and Mitch figured it was just about right for their couch. And what was more, if he knew Amy, he was pretty sure she'd go for it, too. Because even Mitch could tell this was A-one stuff, and it went against his conscience to give it up without at least one more try.

He drove out to the street and went a block or so before he found a parking space. There he called the despatcher and said he had to hang around, he was maybe onto something and he didn't want to boot it. Then he leaned back in his car and relaxed.

What stood out was, you don't tell the police to lay off a sabotage investigation and then bawl them out for stopping a larceny investigation unless you're scared they'll find out something that can hurt you, and hurt you bad. So Mitch ought to find out just what was going on.

Waiting there he didn't exactly go to sleep, on account he had to watch every car that went by. On the other hand there was no reason why he couldn't take it easy for a while. The only thing that bothered him was, suppose the lieutenant wanted to know why

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he suddenly got all hot and bothered by a case the precinct ought to be handling, and why get in their hair about it? But on the other hand, maybe the lieutenant wouldn't ask.

Along about half-past four Mitch decided he ought to watch the traffic a little more careful, and by and by Eddie Verber drove by. It was no trick for Mitch to slide out of sight for a few seconds, and it was no trick to tail Verber, either. Mitch stayed about half a block behind and made sure there was always a car or two between them, but Mitch would have bet he could have tailgated the guy and got away with it.

Verber made the turn into Jefferson and then stayed on the avenue for a couple of miles, until he was in the Big Meadow section, where most of the warehouses were located. There wasn't much traffic at this time in the afternoon, so Mitch let Verber get well ahead of him. When he turned down a side street, Mitch followed along until he spotted where Verber had pulled up in front of a big building.

Mitch stopped a respectable distance away and watched. He could see Verber lift up his trunk lid and haul out the package. When it was half out, he took a knife and jabbed at it a few times. Then he hoisted the package over his shoulder and carried it into the warehouse.

That was enough for Mitch, so he turned his car around and went back to headquarters. The lieutenant, along with the rest of the gang, had knocked off for the day, which was a break for Mitch. Because he didn't want to report that all he'd managed to dig up so far was a Raeburn employee swiping a couple of bolts of stuff, then the boss protecting the guy, then the guy taking the stuff to a warehouse, only slicing it up a little before he took it inside. And what do you make out of that?

Mitch got home a little later than usual. Joey was still in the doghouse because of what he'd done to the couch, and Amy was in the dumps because she'd been pricing materials and they were even more expensive than she'd thought.

"Suppose you got hold of some damaged stuff," Mitch said. "Stuff that had been sliced up a little. Could you use it?"

"It would depend on how badly it was cut up," she said. "Unless it was completely ruined, I think I could piece it, provided I had enough of it. Why? Do you know of any?"

"I just thought I'd look around," Mitch said.

He figured that what it added up to was some kind of an in-

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surance fraud, with Verber sneaking off with a couple of bolts of material every day or so and sticking them away in the warehouse. After a while Raeburn would probably take inventory and tell the insurance company that a few thousand dollars worth of stock was missing. Later on, after he'd fixed it up so that nothing could be traced back to him, he'd sell it off as damaged goods. And if Mitch found out when and where it was sold, he'd probably be able to get himself quite a bargain.

Only things didn't work out that way. Mitch got the news at headquarters the next morning, and the lieutenant spelled it out at the regular morning briefing. Somebody had set off a bomb in McCabe's Steak House and it was going to be closed for a couple of months. Supposedly the same guy ripped up a lot of material at Raeburn's place, and ended the night by swinging a sledge-hammer at half of the new car models at Dupuis' place. Somebody'd heard the racket, phoned Dupuis, and he'd rushed over just in time to get his brains beat up.

"The hospital isn't sure if he'll make it," Decker said, "so we may have a homicide on our hands. It seems that minor vandalism about a month ago was only a dress rehearsal, but this time they really went to town. My guess is that the perpetrator had a grudge against these three people, Dupuis and Raeburn and McCabe, and is trying to put them out of business. Dupuis is in the hospital and can't talk, and McCabe and Raeburn have disappeared.

"Possibly they're dead, but it's just as likely that they left town rather than submit to questioning and admit whatever they're guilty of. Who is on their tail and what crimes they may have committed is anybody's guess. Possibly they have been paying extortion money. Perk, find out where they bank, and check their accounts. Taylor, you were on this yesterday. Any leads?"

"Well," Mitch said, "there's an employee of Raeburn's, name Verber, who might know something. I'd like to follow up on him."

"Right," Decker said. And he went on handing out assignments and covering all the angles he could think of, and there were plenty.

Mitch got out of the squad room as fast as he could. What he had to find out first was why Raeburn covered for Verber. Because the answer to that ought to open up the whole case, and the best place to start was at Fabric & Fashions.

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The place had a sign on the door that said *Closed,* but Mitch got inside easy enough, once he identified himself, and the inside was a mess. Bolts of cloth had been thrown around, and the yard goods were scattered all over the floor and counters. The hired help was trying to fold stuff back and was getting everything tangled up, and if the movies had seen something like this years ago they would have forgotten all about pie throwing.

Mitch got his feet caught up in what looked like maybe the drapes of the mayor's office in City Hall. Then this lug who was dressed up for a wedding or something tapped Mitch on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, but I don't think you belong here."

"Police," Mitch said. "I'm trying to find out what happened."

"Oh!" The bridegroom took a couple of quick breaths and then blinked. "Oh!" he said. "All we know is that when Mr. Karski opened the store this morning, as he always does, he found pandemonium, and these beautiful goods in disarray. And if you don't mind my saying so, you're standing on one of our best damasks."

"Yeah," Mitch said. "So where's Raeburn?"

"*Mister* Raeburn," the man said, "is apparently out of town."

"And Verber?"

"He hasn't arrived."

Mitch frowned and looked down at the damask, and while it had a few smudges, they didn't come from his feet. Which meant that the tangle was probably just that. A tangle. Not too much dirt. And no knife slits that Mitch could notice, and he told himself that Joey could have done a much better job of the vandalism.

So Mitch had goofed yesterday. If he'd put the pressure on Verber instead of just tailing him, maybe nothing would have happened last night. McCabe would have had his restaurant intact and Dupuis would have been in his office selling cars, instead of fighting for his life in a hospital.

Mitch figured the first place to look for Verber was down at that warehouse. Mitch had no warrant, but maybe he could talk somebody into letting him have a look at the storeroom, where Mitch might run into something that would give him a lead to something else. So why not give it a try?

Anyhow, Mitch drove down to the place and rolled into the parking lot over on the side. There were a half dozen cars there and one of them was Verber's, which made Mitch think things over a little. He turned around and drove to behind the

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warehouse, figuring he could leave his car there and Verber wouldn't see it. And in back, standing in an open area with some building junk, like broken concrete blocks and some busted lumber and a few rusty pails, was another car, and it had Raeburn's license plates.

Mitch thought of checking in with the despatcher and asking for some help, but he didn't know whether he'd need it. And besides, that meant waiting around, and when you run into something like this, you figure you ought to move fast. So when Mitch saw that the fire exit was open, he walked in.

The inside of the place was a big concrete area, like a garage, with oversized crates piled all over the place. Along the side there were a bunch of steel-meshed enclosures with furniture and books and bicycles and stuff like that inside them. Mitch could see three staircases, so where to now?

He let out a yell. He had a high-pitched voice and sometimes it squeaked a little, but it had carrying power and he gave it all he had. "Verber!" he yelled. "Eddie Verber!"

He thought he heard some kind of an answer from somewheres upstairs, but whatever it was, it got cut off, and when he yelled again, nothing happened.

He had a kind of funny feeling, a sense of something he ought to stop, only what it was and where it was, was something else again. The one thing, though, was not to stand here and think, so he yelled again and went tearing up the nearest staircase like he knew where he was going.

But at the top of the stairs he was stymied. Because here was a corridor with storerooms on each side, and all the storerooms looked pretty much alike and about all they had to tell them apart was numbers. You could look inside them through the steel mesh, but what you saw was more boxes and more furniture.

Mitch was afraid he'd missed the boat, but what could he do except walk down the hall and keep his eyes open? He took out his gun, but he knew that if Eddie was being held in one of these storerooms, Mitch could walk past and not see a thing. Talk about hiding—let Joey loose in a place like this and you'd never find him, and the same thing went for Verber.

Still, in police work, half of the time you got one chance in a hundred to get what you're after, so you make a hundred stabs at it and hope you'll be lucky. Like now. Because on the door of one of the storerooms Mitch spotted a

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hunk of cloth that had caught on a sharp prong. The cloth was kind of greenish-yellow with a pebbled effect, so Mitch pushed at the door and it swung open.

"Verber," he said, holding his voice down to an ordinary pitch. "Eddie, come on out."

He heard a thump and then a kind of sputter from behind the cartons and bolts of cloth. "Eddie!" he said again, a little sharper on account he was standing here with a gun in his hand and nothing to shoot at, while anybody back there who felt like taking a pot shot could just rip away nice and safe.

Then a couple of cartons toppled over and Raeburn stepped out. Verber, with his arms tied up and a gag in his mouth, was lying on the floor behind him.

Raeburn came out talking his head off. "Taylor, you got here just in time. It's hard for me to believe what happened and that I'm still alive, because Verber went off his rocker, he's crazy as a loon and he tried to kill me. He's a homicidal maniac, I tell you, and he's been stealing me blind—"

"Don't hand me that," Mitch said, cutting the guy off and sticking his gun in Raeburn's belly. Mitch rammed hard and he could feel the muscle in the guy.

"Just put your hands up," Mitch said. "All the way up, over your head, and then walk over to the grating and stick your nose up against it and stay there, with your back to me. Come on—move!"

Raeburn kind of coughed and then he obeyed, but real slow.

After that it was all Mitch's show. He ripped the gag off Verber and Verber shot off his mouth while Mitch listened. And the story Eddie Verber handed out, it knocked Mitch for a loop. At first it was hard to take, but later on, after the Homicide Squad had followed up on it and checked with McCabe and Dupuis, who came out of his coma and was able to identify Raeburn as his assailant, everything Verber had said turned out to be true.

What he said was, around ten years ago when he was a kid, Verber had seen some dame go out in a canoe on the lake near where he lived. A squall came up and a couple of guys came along in a big outboard and circled around the canoe and waited for it to tip over and then watched this dame drown. The two of them had a bottle and they kept drinking and laughing, and after a while they revved up the outboard and went away. Verber was only a kid and he was too scared to tell anybody what he'd seen.

Later on Verber found out

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that the dame was Raeburn's fiancée and that the two guys in the boat were McCabe and Dupuis. Verber kept the story to himself for years, but finally he went to the local police, who didn't believe him and told him that even if it was true they couldn't do anything about it so long after it happened.

But the whole business kept bothering Verber, and finally he decided to go see Raeburn and tell him the story, which he had a right to hear.

Raeburn had listened, and then he hit the roof and said he'd get even, and he made Verber promise never to tell the story to anybody else, and he offered Verber a job.

Raeburn's scheme was pretty clear. Sabotage McCord's and Dupuis' business, ruin them, get his revenge, and pretend the same thing was happening to himself. They'd never dare admit how, just for kicks, they'd watched a girl drown and had done nothing to save her.

Verber was dumb enough to fall for Raeburn's story about an insurance fraud, so he saw nothing wrong in Raeburn telling him to hire a storeroom and take a couple of bolts of stuff there every day. He told Verber he could sell the stuff and keep the money just as long as he sliced it up a little and sold it cheap as damaged goods.

Maybe everything would have worked out, too, if Raeburn hadn't beat up Dupuis so bad last night. But here Mitch Taylor, a homicide man, had stuck his nose into things, and the rest of the homicide squad would be around and question Verber. Once he gave away Raeburn's motive and his fake losses, Raeburn was through, so he just about had to get rid of Verber. And would have, if Mitch hadn't shown up.

Verber fell all over himself thanking Mitch. "Anything you want," Verber said, "go ahead and take it. It's yours."

Which was how come Mitch told Amy the next morning to come down with him, he wanted her to pick out some material for the couch. But the funny thing was, when Mitch looked back at it all, without Joey ruining the couch, which was getting a little old anyhow, how would they have got a brand-new upholstery job? Greenish-yellow, with a pebbled effect. And for free, at that.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 430th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a story of irony and pathos interwoven with crime. . .

The author, Jean Darling (does the name sound familiar?), entered show business at the really tender age of six months. For five years she was the Leading Lady in the "Our Gang" Comedies (remember?). Later she played "Carrie" in the original Broadway production of "Carousel," and since has appeared in many stage, radio, and television shows. She married Kajar the Magician and has "wandered the world" in their own magic show, with their son Roy acting as stage manager.

Jean Darling added something else to her "dossier"—an interesting observation. "Singing and acting," she wrote, "one is trained to do, painting is merely copying what one sees, but writing is putting a dream to paper". . .

NEVER TO BE LOST AGAIN

by JEAN DARLING

Today is the first time the sun shone all this week. That's why I'm sitting here in the window seat. The view from this side of the house is still beautiful. It used to be nice from all the windows before Da sold the back garden. He sold it to property developers, as they are laughingly called, who took simply ages to build that great useless pile of brick and glass. They paid Da a good price for the property, but when it had been ours it had given us flowers and vegetables and birdsong each year. Now the brick monstrosity stands unrented, collecting dead leaves and broken windows.

Ron, the only son of the next-door neighbors, was a squatter before he came home this last time. Oh, not in the building out back, but somewhere right in the middle of town. The only reason he returned at all was because the

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house he shared with the rest of his commune was raided by the police and condemned as a health hazard. Da is very upset at having Ron living next door again and he'd do something about it if he could, but Da is helpless. Ron's father owns the house next door, so the boy has a perfect right to stay there.

I'm glad Da can't chase him away, though. Ron always waves and smiles when he passes my window. And I don't really care if he was or is a mainliner; he's kind to me and I love him for it. I suppose you could sort of say it is a Romeo and Juliet romance—really! Guess what my name is? It's Julie—Julie Benson. My father, Da, is Terence Benson, an author and former Ambassador to various African countries.

Anyway, to get back to Ron. He is tall and slender, like a dancer. That's what I want to be, too. I want my legs wound with ribbons, my feet clasped in tiny pink-toed shoes, a toutou swirling around my flying limbs. Some day you'll see me on television floating featherlike across the screen just like the ballet dancer I saw last night. I won't mind the hard work or the practising. Ron and I can be together that way.

We'll get married and keep right on dancing until we become as famous a ballet team as Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn. Our clamoring public will throng the stage door each time we give a performance, and like the Red Sea they'll part for us to pass, their hands reaching out just to touch the air we've moved through. A long elegant Rolls-Royce will whisk us home to our "squat" in the building that has usurped Da's back garden.

I suppose you doubt the truth of the things I have been telling you. You should. Sunshine after rain always makes me daydream. I'm not a dancer and Ron is not my boyfriend. Seriously though, I'm going to be a nurse. I became interested in nursing when Da was Ambassador to Mali. My ambition is to go where Dr. Schweitzer was—they need people there who are brave and strong like me.

Mother won't hear of it because I want to nurse in Black Africa. She's racist, as you can see. So, unless something drastic happens to make Mother change her mind, I suppose nursing as a career will have to be forgotten, even though Da has no objections. But what else can I do? I wouldn't like to be a secretary or a salesgirl in a boutique, and I must make up my mind. Time is growing short. I'll be 22 years old next month.

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The sun has gone away, darkening the sky. Soon the clouds will shed large tears—tears almost as large as the ones locked inside my heart where even Da can't find them.

The rain will ruin Da's *Times* again because he won't carry an umbrella, ever. He says it makes him look like a comedy Englishman. He never wears a hat either, just uses the *Times* to protect him from the rain. Mother hates him to get the paper wet, and says he looks like an old washerwoman with it clutched over his head. She doesn't really appreciate Da. Or me, for that matter.

But then, you see, she didn't really want me. Oh, there was nothing personal. Mother just didn't want children. She had neglected to tell Da of her aversion to childbearing prior to the wedding, but the dear man had been so smitten by her raven-haired beauty, I suppose he would have married her if she had confessed to being Dracula's daughter.

Theoretically I should have two siblings: I was the last of three pregnancies Da hoped through. The first two were terminated by Mother. Number one, a scant year after the marriage, she was the victim of a fall down the stairs. The second had been lost when Mother had ridden to hounds against Da's explicit wishes. When she miscarried for the second time, Da was heartbroken. More than anything he wanted a family. His brothers and sisters had 27 children between them. Mother had come from a long line of single children, and she had decided the line would stop with her.

Years later, when she found herself pregnant for the third time, Mother was off again, dancing, riding—she even took up trampolining. Nothing helped: I stayed the course. After I was born, Da gave up trying for a big family, deciding to quit while he was ahead, I suppose.

I'm sure it will come as no surprise if I tell you that Mother and I are not friends. I wouldn't care two cents if she dropped dead tomorrow. All my love is for Da. He is my idol. When I think that maybe someday I'll be without him, my heart almost shatters with the pain. If anything happened to him, I think I'd die too, I love him so much.

There goes the front doorbell. You hear that ugly clumping? That's Mother tripping daintily in her new platform shoes. She looks simply ridiculous stumping along. She always has embarrassed my dear dignified Da with her way-out dress. From beatnik to hippie, she has been

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"with it" for years. If it were the Twenties, Mother would be dripping fringe and champagne-warped slippers all over pianos in the wee hours of the night; but I shouldn't be unkind. She wasn't always foolish, I've seen pictures of her before my birth and, I must admit, she was beautiful. But no longer, with her bleached piled-up hairdo and platforms worn to dazzle her latest protégé.

The new boy is sallow and acne'd and teaching her Ancient Greek. I wonder if she finds Greek very much different from the modern French or modern Italian she studied in past lessons.

How brazen she is about these grotty little affairs! She flaunts them in my face, knowing I'd never tell Da, that I'd rather die than see him hurt. I try to make it up to him as best I can. He knows how much I love him. But it's difficult when one is grown up. A barrier seems to grow. No longer can I sit clasped tight in his arms, so tight that all feeling of lostness is cradled away. I'm too big for that now.

I remember once, long ago when I was quite small, he took me on a merry-go-round. Mother objected, making some malicious remarks that I recall to this day. I can still hear the cruelty of them and feel the terrible hurt. Da didn't say a word and finally she went away. We stayed on the merry-go-round and the horse went up and down, round and round. Lights flashed, cymbals crashed, music blared, and Da's arms held me so tight I could hardly breathe as he insisted over and over, "It's not your fault, little love. It's not your fault."

Soon after that Da put up the rear garden for sale. Those few months, while it was still ours, were the last happy times Da and I had together. I was on the brink of growing beyond lap size but he could still hold most of me snuggled in his arms. Every evening that long lovely summer he held me close and told me of the "Jumblies" and "The Duck and the Kangaroo." How I wished to be the Duck! To wear socks to keep my feet dry so the kangaroo would take me around the world on his tail, never to be lost or alone again.

If only I could have stayed little, never have grown up. The happy memories are all from those days so long ago when I was a child. Like the Sundays we spent at the beach before the terrible thing happened and we never went again. That last Sunday was just like all the others until Da

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said he'd go for ice cream. As soon as he was out of sight, Mother took me into the sea and swam swiftly out to the breakers. For a minute or so she held me, riding the waves. Then Mother disappeared.

After the momentary terror of being left alone had passed, I felt quite happy. Gentle waves led me down into a shimmering fairy tale where I'd find playmates—the Little Mermaid, the Water Babies, and other storybook friends. Yearnings would be fullfilled, everything would be as it should be. I was home at last.

Then strong arms snatched away the dream, and I was back to being me again. The sand felt warm and dry, and there was a pleasant hum of voices. Someone was rubbing my hands—Da, of course. He was the first person I saw when I opened my eyes. For a moment I thought he was wearing a wreath, then I saw it was a wreath of faces, that haloed his head.

Curious bathers were murmuring concern and nodding encouragement on seeing that the half-drowned little girl was going to be all right. Everyone was glad, every one of them, except one—Mother. She returned my gaze with eyes so filled with hostility, with such naked hatred, that all at once I understood. I had defied her once more by unreasonably clinging to life.

There goes the bell again. I wish she'd answer the door. I get nervous listening to it ring while the person outside is getting cold and wet. It's only the doctor, of course, but he's human and should be let in. He comes every Tuesday and Friday at this time, regular as clockwork. Supposedly he's Da's friend, but that doesn't keep him from having a bit of fun with Spring.

Spring is Mother's name. Ridiculous, isn't it? Spring, at her age! I do wish she'd answer, but she won't until she's finished primping. Fluff, fluff, long red claws combing through her recently bleached hair. I don't have to see her to know every move she makes. The flap of the puff against her nose, the wipe of lipstick, the fingers tracing the fine webbing of wrinkles that creep like mildew, blurring the fineness of her cheek.

She wants to go to Switzerland to have her face lifted, but she can't because Da doesn't have the money. She wants a new mink coat, too, for all the good that will do her. Everything has gone on doctor bills. Just this morning, Da was on the phone to a real-estate agent. The man didn't seem too

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hopeful—nobody really wants a Georgian white elephant of a house as large and cold as ours is. So Mother will have to grow older and uglier, colder and poorer. There is no way now for her to avoid the misery that old age will bring to her.

Ah, at last that horrid ringing has stopped and the wet Dr. Madison has finally been admitted. And here they come, straight as arrows into this room. Oh, oh, look who's slinking in their wake. The little Greek protégé. This could be interesting.

I wonder if she has any idea how unwelcome she is, and the doctor, not to mention the Greek. Mother comes near and dabs in my direction with her handkerchief. Dr. Madison glances at me briefly before settling himself by the fire. The Greek boy sulks in the shadows.

An ear-shattering crash of thunder startles the handkerchief from Mother's hand. The storm shades the room with false night. Mother moves toward the light switch, then, changing her mind, she borrows the doctor's lighter. Soon the room springs to life again with the cheerful glow of candles. That's Mother for you, always the poseur.

But in her zeal she makes one unbelievable mistake. She lights the candle that stands on the taboret in front of my window. She's sitting over there beside the doctor, smoking and chattering like a schoolgirl. The Greek boy is watching them, but nobody is paying the least attention to me. Here, at last, is the chance that I have been waiting for all these years, since that Sunday on the beach.

With one bold stroke I will solve all Da's problems. He'll have money from insurance policies, and then maybe he'll marry some lovely young woman who will give him the family he's always wanted.

If only I can knock over the candle without being seen. Oh, please God, help me now to free Da. I hit the candle—it's rocking. Oh, no! The wrong way! Get away from the curtains! Oh, God, what will I do, what will I—

But look! A breeze has fluttered the curtain across the tiny guttering flame, and the curtain has caught fire. Oh, see the hungry fire, the lovely hungry fire! Goodbye, Mother! Goodbye, Dr. Faithless Friend Madison! Goodbye, Foolish Greek Boy! Oh, Da, be happy!

Flames leaped up to welcome the falling roof. Water arched into the gutted shell of the once-beautiful house. Just a moment before, a man had

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stood black against the flames, and in one sudden thrust shoved a wheelchair out of the inferno to safety. Then he was gone, swallowed in a burst of flame that enveloped the old house.

A patrolman stood talking to a tired fireman lit by the nickelodeon flicker of the fire.

"How'd it start?" asked the cop.

"Crippled kid, Julie Benson, knocked over a candle," answered the fireman.

"Any casualties?"

"One. The crippled kid's father. He got home just in the nick of time to save the girl. Julie's mother was too hysterical to do anything but scream. Two men saved from the fire, too—a foreign kid and a man who says he's a doctor. They're in pretty bad shape." The fireman's voice was hoarse.

"Some kind of dame to run out and leave her kid even if she was hysterical." The cop took off his hat and wiped the sweatband with a handkerchief.

"Yeah, some dame! But she sure has all the luck. She's just become a very wealthy widow. The house was insured for over a hundred thousand, and her husband carried a life policy twice that big so that the kid, Julie, would never have to worry. If it's a double indemnity, that woman certainly will be well-heeled. But I wonder what will happen to the girl. . ."

The fireman looked over at the blanketed figures being helped into the ambulance.

"She'll have the best care money can buy, I suppose. What luck! And all because that poor helpless kid accidentally knocked over a candle."

The cop put back his hat and started on his beat once more.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

The manuscripts of Jean Darling's "Never To Be Lost Again" (EQMM's first story number 430, also in this issue) and Hilary Stevens' "Reflections in a Window" (EQMM's first story number 431) reached our editorial offices within a few days of each other. The Darling story came from Ireland, the Stevens story from Massachusetts. The two stories have one plot point in common, but how differently the two authors have handled that point, how differently they have developed their plots and their meanings! It is a remarkable coincidence that two stories with a similarity in concept should arrive almost simultaneously from authors living thousands of miles apart; but on second thought, perhaps it is even more remarkable, with so many writers constantly seeking story ideas, that the coincidence doesn't happen more often!

Hilary Stevens, the author of "Reflections in a Window," is in her early thirties; she is married to a meteorologist who specializes in the problems of air pollution, and they have one son six years old. Hilary Stevens attended the University of Wisconsin where she majored first in music, then in physics, and finally in chemistry, in which she has a degree. She spent four years teaching and doing research in immunology. "Other interests include reading voraciously (especially mysteries), bridge, and psychic phenomena."

Her first story was written for a course in mystery writing sponsored by the Boston chapter of Mystery Writers of America. The story is deceptively simple (we warn you!), with at least seven clues to its inmost meaning. . .

"Q"

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REFLECTIONS IN A WINDOW

by HILARY STEVENS

There is a queer little window in my hospital room. It does not look outside as an ordinary window does, but into another room, much like mine. There is an old woman in that room, a white-haired, gap-toothed woman no taller than I, and I'm small for a girl of 14.

The first time I saw the woman I was very upset. It didn't seem right that she should be able to look into my room any time she pleased. Mother is paying good money so that I might have a private room. Not that there isn't more than enough money, but that is beside the point. I *should* have my privacy.

Then I realized that the window was an invasion of the old woman's privacy as well, and I began to feel more kindly toward her. Moreover, I soon found that she respected my desires and never came near the window unless *I* approached *her*.

And so, in the end, I came to be happy that the window was there. At least, I have company when I choose to have it, and the old woman is a cheerful soul. She almost always smiles.

There is another window in my room, but it is the usual kind. From it I can look out over the hospital grounds and see the children playing on pleasant afternoons. I do wish they would let me go out and play, too. Oh, I know I am really too old for such childish games, but still it would be *so* nice to run and jump and even roll in the sweet cool grass.

I asked Dr. Sheltenbaum once whether I might go out of doors, but he said it would be too upsetting for me to be among the other children. "If you like, Catherine," he said, "I will allow you to go for a walk with Nurse Wellington."

But I didn't want to walk with Nurse Wellington. I only wanted to play with the children.

Dr. Sheltenbaum shook his grizzled head. "I'm afraid I shall have to insist. Doctor knows best!" And he smiled in his firm yet gentle way. He added, "You know you don't have to *stay* in your room. There are several other parts of the hospital you may visit."

This time I shook my head. If he wouldn't let me go where I wanted, I wouldn't go anywhere.

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Perhaps that is my childish way of punishing him. It is certainly no punishment to me as there is nowhere else I want to go. A hospital is a dull place.

I have been here in the hospital for quite a long time. Ever since the fire.

It was a terrible fire; it consumed our whole house, and our house was very large. The flames came in the middle of the night, giant golden tongues that licked at the staircase and windows, and cackled with glee. I remember staring at the flames, my limbs paralyzed, my tongue struck mute. That is all I remember.

My father died in the fire.

My father was a writer. He loved books and papers and often he would stay in his study, writing, late into the night. Sometimes, exhausted, he would fall asleep there in his armchair. That is what happened on that night, the night of the fire.

My arms and legs were burned that night, and I have many scars. My face was burned, but only a little bit. Dr. Sheltenbaum says my face is not scarred, but he won't give me a mirror to see. I asked for a mirror, and he said I could have one, but he never brought it.

When I asked a second time, he only smiled.

At first I thought that was why he wouldn't let the other children see me. If my face were terribly scarred, it might frighten them. But the skin feels unblemished to my fingers, and the dim reflection I sometimes catch in the window shows me no monster.

It *did* show me one thing that frightened me until the nurse explained.

My hair had been burned in the fire, and when it grew back, it was gray, instead of black. Nurse Wellington says that sometimes happens, and she offered to color my hair for me. "Any color you like, dearie! Have you ever wanted to be a redhead? Or a blonde? Now's your chance!"

I giggled and felt much better and said I'd like to have it colored black the next time Mother came to visit. There didn't seem to be much point in doing it sooner, as no one saw me but the nurse and the doctor and the old woman, and perhaps it would cheer the old woman to see someone so young with gray hair. It might make her feel closer to me.

Mother has not come to see me for some time. A long time, I think. Father's death was hard on her, and it seemed to me that I saw her age with each visit. The last time she was here I was surprised how

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shrunken and withered she looked. She has not been well lately. No one has told me that, but I know it from the way Nurse Wellington looks whenever I ask about my mother. Sometimes I am afraid I will never see her again. If she died, I wonder if they would tell me. Perhaps they would think I was too highstrung to know.

I was especially worried about Mother this morning, so I wrote her a letter. I said I hoped she was feeling well and would come to see me soon. To take me home.

I gave the letter to Nurse Wellington to mail. "Of course, dearie! It'll make the afternoon pickup if I hurry." She smiled at me.

But I watched her go down the corridor, and when she reached the desk that stands at the junction of the four wings of the building, she opened one of the drawers and put my letter into it. It was not an absent-minded gesture, no half-distracted motion. It was quite deliberate.

Later, when Dr. Sheltenbaum came to see me, I told him about it, and his face darkened. "I'll talk to Nurse Wellington, Catherine," he said gently. "I'm sure it was a mistake."

"Oh, please!" I suddenly realized I had grasped his hand in mine. His hand was big and warm. I released it.

"It was a very important letter," I said.

"Oh?"

"To my mother. I want to go home, Dr. Sheltenbaum!"

And then I remembered that I have no home. It is all gone. To ashes and rubble.

I was crying, the silent piercing sobs that begin in the deepest part of me and never really go away.

"It's all over, Catherine. There is no more fire."

I looked at him through my tears. He has a kind face. "Sometimes, Dr. Sheltenbaum, it seems *ever* so long ago."

"That's good, Catherine. Very good. Your mind must learn to forget."

"It was a terrible fire."

"Yes, it was. Now try not to think of it."

"I only wanted to burn his papers. He punished me for touching them. Only *touching* his *precious* papers! I wanted to punish him back! But not like that, not like that. . ."

I was crying again, and Dr. Sheltenbaum put his arms around me and patted my shoulder gently as if I were his own little girl.

"It's all right now, Catherine. I understand."

He is gone now, and I am

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lonely again, here in my gray empty room with only the sadness that grows deep in me and seems to be swallowing me up from the inside. It is at times like this that I am glad I have the queer little window over the bureau.

I run to it, and the old woman comes, as always.

I smile.

She smiles.

I wave.

She waves.

Playfully she mimics my every movement. As my sadness shrinks a bit, I can see that the old woman's eyes are also red. She too has been crying. I wonder why?

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a *NEW* crime novelet by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Martin Milligan, in deep personal and business trouble, was ripe for a desperate venture. With his life a shambles, what did he have to lose? But Marty never thought negatively. With his flaming Irish temper and hard fists to back it up, Marty thought of what he had to gain in this game played for high stakes . . . a novelet that reads like a house afire. . .

DANGEROUS ENTERPRISE

by WILLIAM BANKIER

It began with Milligan bringing his hand down flat on the fragile rosewood table causing a crystal wineglass to topple and fall, as if in slow motion before his glazed eyes, and smashing on the parquet floor.

"Martin, don't start," Deirdre said. She went to stand beside her new man.

What Milligan wanted to say was that he was beating the furniture to avoid beating the pale young person who now stood one pace in front of Milligan's wife, his eyes wide and his mouth clenched like a small fist. Behind him, Deirdre loomed large, almost twice his size. At another time Milligan might have laughed.

He said, "You'd better listen to me because I haven't even started yet. What the hell is going on here?"

"I told you when I left Montreal I wasn't coming back."

"We told each other a lot of things."

"And I remember every single one of them."

"We've told each other worse. And got back together."

"Not this time. I'm in London to stay."

"Like hell. You're coming back with me."

"No, I'm not. I'm never coming back." Deirdre stepped from behind her lover and confronted her husband, pushing back

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waves of dark red hair with both hands. "You're such a fool, Marty. I don't know what else to call you. I knew you had detectives following me and that was bad enough. But here you stand, drunk at two o'clock in the afternoon, smashing the furniture and pretending I'm going to come running back to you. Well, I won't."

"Deirdre, it isn't as if I'm not trying. I thought I could make it myself, but I can't. Don't make me plead in front of this jerk."

The young man spoke for the first time. "My name is Lane. And I'm not afraid of you, Milligan. We see people a lot sicker than you at the hospital every day."

"I'll plant him, so help me," Milligan said. "Come out of here, Deirdre. Come back to my hotel."

"You aren't going to plant anybody. Go back to your hotel by yourself. Put your things in a bag and catch the next plane to Montreal. I have a good reason for not coming with you."

"I don't want to hear."

"You have to hear." She put out one hand and took his wrist. Her grip was cold, as firm as a manacle. "I'm three months pregnant. I'm going to have Lane's baby."

Milligan almost collapsed. "Help me, God," he whispered.

"I'm happy, Marty. You must try to understand that. And we'll both be better off if you just get the divorce thing going and we head our separate ways. Anyway, it doesn't matter to me or Lane. Divorce or not, we're going to live together."

Milligan turned away from his wife and in doing so struck the little table with his hip. The other wineglass fell over onto a plate of salad. Deirdre steadied the table and set the glass erect. She took up a linen napkin and wiped a streak of dressing from the crystal, frowning, intent on having a clean glass.

"But it would be so much better if we could simply be divorced the way so many other people are these days. Life would go on. It isn't the end of the world."

He could not raise his voice above a croak. There was no wind in him. "Don't say this to me."

"Martin, you're such a stubborn fool. You said you wanted babies as much as I do. Well, then, all you had to do was take the test and prove why we weren't having any."

"Shut up. I feel like killing myself."

"Don't start that again. It's just talk. That's all you are these days is talk."

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The young doctor said, "The fact is plenty of men are sterile. If you really want to have a family in the future, I mean with some other woman, why not consider adoption, or artificial insemination?"

Deirdre said quietly, "You always wanted to blame it on me. Well, Lane and I have proved the trouble wasn't with me." She sat down with a straight back and folded her hands across her stomach.

Now Milligan was outside walking erratically along Bayswater Road, heading west. He crossed the wide street in the middle of a block, challenging the traffic in both directions. A taxi swerved and came to a full stop and the driver put his head out of the window and yelled, "Get stuffed, you great drunken twit!"

Milligan entered Kensington Gardens through Lancaster Gate and strode across the grass. A pickup game of soccer football was in progress and he reeled through the middle of it, cursing, kicking the white ball into a tree, ignoring the cries of the offended players as he stumbled on. There were canvas chairs dotted across the lawns. He headed for one set in the shade of a chestnut tree and fell into it. The chair creaked under his 240 pounds, but it supported him. He closed his eyes.

At first thoughts of Deirdre tried to force their way to the top of his mind, but he fought against them. For months he had been running after her and, having found her today, where could he run to now?

The park was quiet. His chair was only a few hundred yards from the street, yet traffic noises were almost nonexistent. Gradually one of his favorite memory sequences came back to him. He was standing on the pitcher's mound at the old Atwater Baseball Park in Montreal, wearing his Verdun Shamrocks uniform. There were several thousand people in the stands and they were making lots of noise, but all Milligan's concentration was focused on the batter. The Shamrocks were one run ahead in the ninth inning and there was a man on third base, not through any fault of Milligan's but because the third baseman had made a throwing error after fielding a routine ground ball.

There were two strikes on the batter, both blazing fastballs Milligan had thrown across the center of the plate. The catcher was signaling now for a low, outside pitch, but Milligan shook off the sign. He would do it his way. He would reach

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back for something even faster and challenge the man right down the middle of the strike zone.

He had pitched nine innings, but he wasn't tired. Milligan was 20 years old and too good for this league. He knew it, the major-league scouts knew it. The people in the stands knew it, too; they wouldn't have Marty Milligan to cheer for much longer. They would have to read about him in the newspapers.

His windup felt good, perfectly balanced, his cleated left shoe raised high in the air, the ball in his right hand almost touching the ground behind him. The throwing motion was all fluid coordination ending in a long striding follow-through, his eyes on the ball as it streaked toward the catcher's mitt. The batter swung hard, but he was late. Strike three, the game was over!

Milligan strode from the mound to the dugout, head down, glove dangling in his left hand. As he crossed the third-base line, he raised his head to the applauding stands and gave the peak of his cap a slight lift. . .

He opened his eyes into blazing sunlight. The shady area had fallen away onto the grass on the other side of the tree and his face was burning, his shirt sweat-soaked under his linen suit. He stood up, took off his jacket, and went looking for a drink.

Milligan found a pub on the Bayswater Road. The patio out front was full to standing and there were bodies lined up at the bar inside. He managed to reach across heads with a one-pound note in his hand and get a pint of draught Guinness which he carried to an empty space on the wall where he leaned and drank heavily. The pint went down easily and he went back for another.

Accustomed to the layout of the pub by this time, he noticed a doorway leading to a small back room. He took his beer through and saw an empty chair in the corner. Trying to get past a crowded table, he stepped on some feet. A blonde-haired girl in an expensively cut blue denim jacket drew her legs in, picked up her drink, and showed Milligan her straight, narrow back.

"Excuse me," he said.

She was listening to the conversation of a well-groomed man across the table. His face was deeply tanned, setting off the color of narrow green eyes. His mouth was narrow, too—almost unpleasantly thin—but as he spoke, he smiled and his face lit up with magnetic enthusiasm.

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Milligan squeezed into the chair in the corner, taking a long pull at the mug of beer and watching the tanned man's animated face over the blonde girl's shoulder. Her hair was short and almost white, like cornsilk. Her companion leaned forward and tapped her on the shoulder. She turned; her eyes were hidden behind large dark sunglasses. Her lips were smiling at what the man across the table had been telling her.

"I said excuse me," Milligan said. His voice was loud in the tiny room.

"That's all right. Forget it."

Milligan sat back and wondered why he didn't want to forget it. He had stepped on her feet and she had said it was all right, but forgetting it seemed a lot to ask. He also wondered how he would be able to squeeze back out in a few minutes to get another beer. This one was going down rapidly.

He liked the English pub system of having no waiters, everybody getting their own drinks at the bar. It might make sense to put in a room like that at his restaurant back in Montreal. But right now it was a hazard for him to get another beer. Somebody would grab the seat the moment he left it.

As he finished his beer, Milligan assessed the table in front of him. Besides the girl and the slender sun-bronzed playboy who was dressed in expensive clothes, there were two other men at the table. One was built like a fire hydrant, squat and round in strained slacks and a black turtleneck sweater. His curly hair was greasy and his face was red and coated with sweat. He looked as if he had been holding his breath for an hour.

The other was more a boy than a man, probably no older than 18. His hair was the same color as the girl's, silky blond, and it hung straight down almost to his shoulders. Milligan guessed they could be brother and sister. He drained his glass mug and stood up, leaning over the girl and putting his face close to her cheek.

"I'm going to get another beer," he said.

She kept her face pointed across the table at the sleek playboy who turned his smile on Milligan. "Good luck," she said.

"Would you see that nobody takes my chair?"

The playboy said, "Don't worry about it. We'll take care of it for you." His voice was New York American.

Milligan went to the bar, stopping to visit the men's room on the way. When he returned with a fresh pint, he found the

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young blond boy sitting in the single chair. As he approached, the boy got up, grinning. "It seemed like the easiest way to protect it. Saved telling everybody the same story." Another American voice, not New York but clearly East Coast.

"Thanks a lot," Milligan said. He sat down, noticing as the boy shifted back to the table that one of his shoes had a thick built-up sole and heel.

The playboy was saying, "I want you to listen to me, Vera. We must get out of that hotel. I hate it."

The girl said, "We just checked in."

"There's no better time to check out."

The toad in the turtleneck sweater said, "You're kidding. Find another hotel room? In London? In July?" At last an English accent; the girl's speech was East Coast like her brother's.

The boy said, "You should have told Dad you were coming. I put through a call to New York this morning. He hasn't heard from you in six months, Vera."

"My father can go take a flying front one-and-a-half off the Statue of Liberty."

The boy laughed uncomfortably. "But he could have fixed you up with one of his apartments here."

Milligan's mind began to wander. He thought of his restaurant back in Montreal, wondered how it was making out without him, and told himself it was probably dying, even at the height of the tourist season. The days were long gone when the presence of Martin Milligan would bring in enough customers to make the restaurant pay. Six months more at this rate and he would lose the place. Then what would he do?

In the old days tourists would come in from all over the United States and Canada to see the young man who had been the most promising pitcher on the New York Mets' roster. There would be smiles, warm handshakes, and respectful questions about the injury that had terminated his career after only two spectacular seasons. Did he think he could ever make a comeback? Was he bothered any longer by the headaches and double vision? They loved recalling that line drive off Hickman's bat that struck him on the forehead like a bazooka shot.

There had been years of such attention with Milligan's Restaurant attracting almost as many pilgrims to Montreal as St. Joseph's Oratory. Then gradually a new generation took over and Milligan's name was no longer an attraction. He

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could take a taxi right now to Tower Bridge and throw himself into the Thames and he'd never be missed. In fact, he would probably be doing Deirdre and friend a big favor.

No, he would not think of Deirdre now, of the way he used to walk into the dark townhouse on Mountain Street, thinking it empty, feeling tense and lonely. Then he would hear her voice from the kitchen and all the anxiety would drain out of him and he would relax, safe at home.

For once the playboy at the next table was listening while the turtlenecked toad did the talking. His lah-de-dah English voice contradicted his burly appearance. "I know one of the lads in the Parachute Battalion on guard duty in Belfast. He says you can't turn your back without some Catholic taking a shot at you. They've got the kids involved too, throwing acid bombs. Some education for a six-year-old."

Milligan sat up straighter in his chair.

"The only thing to do," Toad went on, "is for the Protestants to show the Catholics the same treatment. Give 'em back two bombs for one. That's the only message they'll understand."

Milligan leaned forward and rapped on the table with one knuckle. All three faces turned his way. He addressed the red sweaty one. "Excuse me. Do you know what the hell you're talking about?"

Toad smiled and the crimson of his face moved one shade closer to black. "This is a private conversation. Keep out of it."

"No, I'm sorry. I am in this conversation and the thing that strikes me is some people might think you're speaking English, but what is coming out of your fat mouth is malarky."

Playboy began to say, "Now, Tony, it would be better if—"

Tony stood up and so did Milligan. "There's a space just outside," Tony said. "We can settle this without troubling anybody else."

Milligan kept his eyes on Tony's muscular body as he followed him into the alley. The toad looked solid and he walked with a lot of confidence—not a man to be taken lightly.

They entered a small paved courtyard behind the pub. Turning around, Tony began to say, "This should be—" and Milligan hit him as hard as he could right below the heart. The man's eyes widened and his mouth hung slack. Milligan drew back again and drove his right fist through the man's fat nose, thinking of the back of his head as he did it.

Tony took two short steps

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back against the brick wall and began to sag at the knees, blood pouring from his smashed nose over his chin and onto the black sweater. He raised his right fist and threw a roundhouse punch which Milligan avoided easily.

Then, drawing back his right shoe, Milligan kicked Tony's shins as hard as he could, one after the other. As he bent forward, Milligan brought up his knee, closing the man's left eye and snapping his head back.

Milligan felt a hand on his arm. Playboy had come out into the yard. "That's enough. You've done enough," he said.

"Get back," Milligan said. He turned to Tony who was bending over a dustbin and hit him on the side of the head with the heel of his hand. Tony fell, knocking the dustbin over, and Milligan stomped on his extended ankle.

"Cut it out! That's it! That's all!" The playboy's eyes were green balls on white saucers in his golden face. "He's hurt enough."

"I don't want him following me."

"He won't follow you. Go back inside. I'll get him out of here."

Milligan watched as the playboy knelt beside his friend. He heard Tony say, "Never gave me a chance, the scum."

Milligan bent close. He said, "I wanted to kill you, but your friend stopped me."

"Go on inside," playboy said, "and send out Lester, the young lad. Will you do that?"

"Sure." Milligan headed for the open doorway.

"And will you do me a favor? Stick around until I come in? I want to talk to you."

"Are you getting rid of him?"

"Yes, he's going home. It's a long way, but he's going."

"Okay. I'll see you inside."

Milligan went into the pub and told Lester to report to the back yard. The boy left the room taking uneven steps on the built-up boot at the end of his left leg.

Milligan sat down at the table. The blonde girl said nothing. She sat facing him but the dark sunglasses were opaque; she might have been observing him or she might have been looking over his shoulder.

"Your boy friend asked me to wait for him."

"Fine."

"Sorry to bust up your party."

"Tony Ackland is no particular friend of mine." She drank from a small glass that held what looked like gin. Then she said, "For what it's worth, I didn't like what he said about Catholics either."

"Are you one?"

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"I'm a Muslim this week. I think next week I may be a Jew."

"You'll never make it. I hear they have tough exams."

"I'll pay somebody."

"You've got lots of money?"

"Enough for now."

Milligan reached across to his former table and retrieved his mug of beer. "Is the guy with the tan your husband?"

"Normie? Lord, no. He's just one of my habits."

"You make it sound like you've got lots of habits."

"I've tried them all. Know any new ones?"

"I used to, but I forget."

"All you need is somebody to jog your memory."

"That could take time. I've got a bad case of amnesia."

"If you get lucky, it only takes a minute." She took off the dark glasses and Milligan saw her eyes for the first time. They surprised him. They were younger eyes than he had expected to see—gray-blue, and cold as slate.

The playboy was back. "Hey, good. I see you two have gotten to know each other. I'm Norman Quast. What's your name, slugger?"

"Martin Milligan."

They shook hands. The girl said, "I'm Vera Logan," and he took her hand, too. It felt hard and small, and polished.

Quast sat down and the table seemed to adjust itself to his presence. The world always pointed his way. "Okay. What's with you Milligan? Do you always go around trying to kill guys who say something you don't like?"

"This is my bad day."

"Vera, you should have seen what he did to Ackland. He destroyed him. If I hadn't gone out there we would have had one dead body on our hands."

"Where's Lester?" the girl asked.

"Taking Tony home in a taxi. The guy can hardly move."

"Should Lester be alone with him?"

"Why not? Tony can't tell him anything. He didn't even know what he was supposed to do yet."

"But we were counting on him."

"Never mind."

"We can't do it a man short."

"We'll find somebody else. Somebody better."

Milligan said, "If you folks don't mind, I'm going to get some food."

"Wait," Quast said. "Hang in for just a minute while I ask you something. I work on hunch, and if there's one thing I am it's a good judge of character. I've been watching you since you came in here. I spotted you for a winner as soon as

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you walked across the room. And after seeing how you wiped out Ackland, I know I was right. Tell me something, are you all hung up with responsibilities right now?"

"Not really."

"Are you free to disappear from London for a while and pick up $50,000 for a few days' work?"

Vera said in a warning tone, "Norman—"

"It's all right, sweetie. This guy feels beautiful to me. Yes, Martin Milligan feels exactly right."

"Tony Ackland felt right."

"Listen, Martin. I want to put a proposition to you. It's dangerous, I won't kid you about that. But it's a chance to put a little adventure in your life. And I have a hunch you're a man who could stand a little adventure in his life. Let's go somewhere quiet and I'll buy us all dinner and we'll talk about it. What do you say?"

Quast's eager face was suspended over the table, close to Milligan's. Vera turned away and shook her head slowly.

"You know what I say?" Milligan said. "I say I think my hand is busted."

Norman Quast charmed the whole dining room at dinner, waiters and customers alike. All Milligan could do was eat left-handed, his bandaged right hand throbbing on his lap, and stare at his host balefully through an alcoholic haze. They probably didn't realize how drunk he was; most people didn't because he could pour a lot of liquor into the large Irish head that thrust up like a fence post from his size-17 shirt collar, a cylinder of ruddy flesh and bone capped by a mass of thick black hair salted with gray.

"This remind you of anything?" Quast asked Vera after he had sent the wine steward strutting away, radiant with Quast's praise of the mediocre Reisling he had brought them.

Vera looked around. "The ship," she said.

They were dining aboard Old Caledonia, a converted paddle-wheeler tied up alongside the Victoria Embankment. Big Ben and the Parliament Buildings played the part of a tourist poster outside the window. A hundred yards away a longboat of sailors in training pulled on their oars to make some headway against the Thames current.

"We met aboard Queen Elizabeth II," Quast said to Martin. "How long ago was it, three years?"

Vera's assent was a slow lowering of the eyelids as she ate

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scampi. Milligan enjoyed that langorous expression. He wanted to see it again. By leaning back in his chair he could observe a few inches of dark nylon where her thigh pressed the edge of the chair. He leaned back frequently.

"I was a clarinet player in one of the ship's orchestras," Quast went on. "And here was this knockout of a blonde tearing up the dance floor every night in the Double Down. It took me till noon on the second day to get a conversation going with her and I don't think we've spent a day apart since then."

"Congratulations," Milligan said. He reached for his wine with the right hand, winced, and started over again with the left.

"You're lucky that's not broken," Quast said. "Still, I'm not belittling the injury. A sprain can hurt like hell."

Milligan had been fascinated watching Quast talk them into and out of St. Mary's Hospital Emergency in less than half an hour. Quast must have been a new experience for socialized medicine.

Vera said, "He says he was just a clarinet player but you should have heard him play. Do you like jazz?"

Milligan nodded. It was one of his beefs about Montreal, which was an okay town in most respects but was light on good jazz clubs. Years ago when he was in the Mets organization, he used to stand up at bars in Manhattan and drink a lot of beer listening to people like Cozy Cole and Sol Yaged. Now there was a clarinet player—Yaged.

"Normie used to be one of the top studio players in New York."

"Let's not open up that little chapter, sweetie," Quast said. He smiled openly at Milligan as if he was about to tell of a trophy he had won for attendance at Sunday School. "A little trouble with the musicians' union. I was producing commercial music tracks for the ad agencies and that was great until I started keeping all the money they paid me. Not paying the sidemen. That's a no-no."

Vera waved her finger like a bored schoolteacher. "You're a bad boy, Norman Quast," she said, and Milligan realized she was as drunk as he was.

"Well, what the hell," Quast said. "If they hadn't busted me I wouldn't have ended up on the QE2, and I'd never have met Vera Logan."

"And neither of us would have met Martin Milligan."

"Good girl. Precisely the point." Quast emptied the wine

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bottle into their glasses and signaled with the bottle for another. "It's explanation time."

"Explain me the $50,000 for a few days' work. That's what got me out here—I'm afraid of ships." Milligan glanced past Vera's shoulder at his reassuring view of the gangplank connecting the Old Caledonia with the riverbank. He could not imagine himself ever taking a sea voyage the way these two had. To be in mid-Atlantic, even in a floating hotel like their luxury liner, and unable to get off would drive him crazy. He was terribly claustrophobic. The only way Milligan could endure an airplane trip was by deadening himself beforehand with booze.

Quast laughed. "It's so easy you can start spending the money tomorrow."

"I'm surrounded by hands waiting for cash." Milligan was almost afraid to get his hopes up. If there was only some way he could find enough money to keep the restaurant going, then it followed that he could sponsor the ball team again next season. Which meant lots more of those great evenings at Snowden Park with Lucien Lacoste and Neil Coleman and the rest of the gang, cleaning up the opposition in the Commercial League. Something told him it was pathetic for a grown-up man to depend so heavily for his happiness on an amateur ball team. But something else told him why the hell not, what else was there?

"Have you ever heard of a man named Castle Logan?" Quast asked him.

"Anybody who's been around New York knows of Castle Logan. Does he still lead the big dance band?"

Vera lowered her eyelids again. "He not only leads that one, he farms out dozens of bands under his name. Half the parties in New York on any given night have Castle Logan bands providing the music." She sucked a tooth that produced a boorish snap. "Dear old Dad always knew how to make money."

"You're the same Logan?"

"She's the same Logan," Quast confirmed, "and so is young Lester, the lad who saved your seat for you back in the pub."

"My fair-haired brother," Vera droned, "the apple of Daddy's eye." She was beginning to sound like a sour old drunk, almost but not quite spoiling for Milligan the erotic effect of those silky legs and the pale sensual eyes.

"Now here's the gig," Quast went on. "We are going to kidnap young Lester. And Castle

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Logan is going to pay two hundred thousand bucks to get him back."

Milligan felt a slight chill along his hair line. Something made him say, "No blood?"

"Of course no blood. Who wants to hurt anybody?" Quast's tanned face reared back and regarded Milligan with amazement. "And who needs it? Listen. This will be the easiest money any of us ever picked up. All we do is feed the boy a lot of booze at a party at my place. This is no problem—all the Logans drink like fish."

His narrow green eyes darted once in Vera's direction. She didn't miss the remark; her lips, pursing to receive the wineglass, silently formed an obscene phrase.

"Then we pound in a couple of seconals," Quast went on, "just enough to keep him under. And we take him on a plane. Where? To New York City."

"Daddy will think he's somewhere in London," Vera said. "Lester just phoned him this morning."

"Especially he will think so when he gets in his personal mail a ransom letter, postmarked London, telling him to get the money ready. To be paid to a New York representative who will contact him that day. That would have been Tony Ackland. Now it's you."

"Will he pay?"

"He'll pay," Vera said. "He'll dig into the safety-deposit boxes where he keeps the undeclared loot. For Lester baby, he'd sell his soul."

"And even mortgage his C-Melody saxophone," Quast said. "Can you see how beautiful this is, Martin? He'll be told to keep the police out of it, and he probably will. But even if he calls them in, the cops will start looking in London. But Lester will be in New York. And they'll never suspect me and Vera; we were in California yesterday and we'll be back there as soon as we split the cash. As for you—well, hell, Martin Milligan has nothing to do with anything. No connection whatever."

Something was bothering Milligan. He said, "What happens when Lester wakes up? He remembers he saw you in London. If I were you, I would have stayed out of his sight. Let somebody else get him drunk."

Quast was nodding and smiling as Milligan spoke. "You're fast," he said. "That would have been better. What happened was, this scheme only came to me today, after we ran into Lester unexpectedly. But that's what's good about it. A simple spontaneous action without a lot of complicated planning to

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go wrong. We just do it. We go! No problems."

Milligan couldn't help thinking of the scrub ball games he used to play in, spur of the moment, totally disorganized. But hadn't they been the most fun? He had to laugh. "It's a game," he said.

"A game. Right. For big stakes."

"But what about when Lester wakes up and blows the whistle?"

"He won't blow any whistle. He'll be so doped he won't remember a thing. So he says he saw us in London, big deal. I'm here on business, then I'm back in L.A. Go prove something."

Milligan was starting to enjoy himself for the first time in weeks. He said, "You're crazy, Quast. You know that, huh?"

"Totally insane," Quast agreed. "The mad impresario. Quast Productions presents *The Snatching of Lester Logan*. Starring a host of brilliant performers including Martin Milligan, the voice on the telephone, the innocent Lester Logan, the not-so-innocent sister Vera, with a special guest appearance by the one and only Castle Logan and his Dancing Dollars. Everything under the direction of the boy genius Norman Quast whose credits include writing, casting, directing, and pulling all the strings." He turned to the others in the restaurant and raised his voice and his arms. "Let's hear it for the Boy Genius!"

The dining room echoed with enthusiastic applause from waiters, maitre d', and customers. Milligan was grinning and shaking his head as the three of them trooped out after Quast left a generous tip on the table. These nutty people cheering and clapping, he thought. They don't even know what they're doing, they just go ahead and do it. The whole world's crazy!

Back in Quast's and Vera's hotel room, time fell apart for Milligan. Whenever his wrist watch happened to pass in front of his eyes, he would notice that 45 minutes had been cranked out, or an hour and a half. They seemed to have killed a couple of large bottles of gin and suddenly it was past midnight and Quast had sent a room-service boy to the kitchen for milk and vanilla and God-knows-what-else and he was now busy adding crushed ice to the mixture in a cocktail shaker.

"Ramos gin fizz," he said. "The way they make 'em in New Orleans. Wait till you taste this."

Milligan tasted it. It was very easy drinking, something like a vanilla milk shake with

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a kick. He raised his socked feet onto the arm of the sofa on which he had been stretched out for some time. He smiled into the glass. This was the night he had dreaded facing alone. Why? Life was exciting; you lost people, you stayed loose, you met other people.

Vera Logan had changed into a loose one-piece garment of sheer pale-blue nylon which gripped at the neck and wrists and ankles. When she raised her arms she was the shape of a floating manta ray, and when she passed in front of a light, her naked body moved inside a glowing, transparent tent.

She came now and took Milligan's glass from his hand and pulled him to his feet. He was a foot and a half taller than she was. When he put his arms around her and picked her up and kissed her, she was a long way off the ground.

"Carry me around that corner," she said.

As Milligan carried her to the short section of the L-shaped room and lowered her onto the bed, Quast said from the radio set where he had been working the tuner, "A little *nachtmusik*. This cat is playing good records. The next hour is going to be all John Coltrane."

Then Milligan's mind was washed in waves of harsh sound as the tenor saxophone player blew lines of angry notes that wound up and down and into areas where no musician had penetrated before.

Vera's body smelled of cinnamon and they were both wet with perspiration in this room that had never known air conditioning. Eventually Milligan must have passed out because when he rolled over, he saw Quast and Vera beside him. He watched them with dull eyes and saw Quast grinning like a Cheshire cat.

Later, with his eyes closed, he came out of a half dream to smell pungent cigarette smoke and hear Quast talking about food. "And that shrimp *rémoulade*," he was saying, "do you remember that? Man, the way they eat down there." He sighed. "I'm telling you, if I ever run away, look for me in New Orleans. In the Vieux Carré, eating sea food."

"Shut up your big yap," Vera said.

"What shut up?" Quast rumbled. "He's out like a light."

And suddenly Milligan was.

They were both up and dressed when Milligan awoke. He heard them around the corner in the other part of the room, talking quietly over the clink of plates and cutlery. He could smell toast and coffee, and Milligan was reminded with a

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flash of anguish of mornings when as a boy he had lain awake in bed listening to his mother and father talking in the kitchen outside the tiny room where he slept in the same bed with his young brother Mike. Soon through the window he would hear the clang against the iron pole and he and Mike would be up and into their shorts and running shoes and off to the East Hill playgrounds for another day in the endless summer of horseshoes and baseball, and if it rained, everybody would jam into the old wooden pavilion with the sides down letting in the wet green smell while somebody hammered *Chopsticks* on the almost toothless piano.

Guilt flooded through him as he recalled last night. Then the image of Deirdre and her doctor friend arose in his mind—Deirdre at last with child after ten years of a marriage which Milligan had managed to convince himself was okay. Not a great marriage, but okay.

"God, what is happening to me?" Milligan whispered. It was not a rhetorical question. "Help me, God, please." His lips fluttered over the words, "I'm not a wicked man. But I'm feeling worse every day and I don't know what's happening to my life. Help me out of this, and forgive me all my sins."

Vera's voice came brightly from her head thrust around the corner. "I thought I heard you muttering away in there." She looked brushed and scrubbed. "Wakey, wakey, rise and shine!" She snapped a mouthful from the slice of crisp toast she was holding and disappeared.

Dressed and shaved, Milligan felt scarcely better, but he was able to eat and listen to Quast's new idea.

"Came to me in the middle of the night," he said, "like the voice of an angel. We don't take Lester to New York. Not now that we have a new partner. We fly him to Montreal where we bed him down and stay with him, Vera and I, in your place while you fly to New York and pick up the money. Montreal is even better. There's nothing to connect Lester with Montreal."

Quast was watching Milligan like a father staring at his new baby. "Now all I need is for you to tell me your place is full of wife and kids."

"No," Milligan said. "I live alone."

Quast turned to Vera and they slapped flat hands the way football players do when a pass is completed. "What did I tell you?" he chortled. "This enterprise is now enchanted. Milligan has brought us new luck."

They sat separately on the

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plane. Not having been a part of the afternoon's preparation of Lester Logan during which the boy was made drunk and later fed the seconal, Milligan was surprised to see the way he was delivered to the plane.

Had it not been for the club-foot, Milligan would not have recognized him. Gone was the slim, blond-haired youth in student garb of jeans and T-shirt. He came aboard the plane supported like an invalid by Quast and Vera, and dressed in a feminine pant-suit with a smooth black wig covering his own hair and with an expert touch of makeup on cheeks and lips.

There was an empty seat beside Milligan. Halfway across the Atlantic, Quast came and sat in it. He was smoking a thin elegant cigar and there was an exuberant puff to his cheeks. He looked closely at Milligan who was fighting his fear of airplanes.

"Are you okay?"

"I'll make it." Sometimes Milligan wondered if he would have been able to hack all the jet travel that pro baseball players face. Maybe the hit on the head was a blessing in disguise; it got him out of baseball and back on the ground. He remembered reading about how one of his favorite pitchers years ago, Don Newcombe, had tried hypnotism to cure his fear of flying. Milligan did not believe in hypnotism. He felt God gave people these fears for a reason. But in his own case he did not want to know the reason.

To get off the subject he said, "Why the Halloween costume on the kid?"

Quast beamed. "My latest idea. Those are Vera's things, the wig and the suit. Nobody will remember seeing Lester Logan leave London."

Milligan looked at Quast. "But he's traveling on a passport, isn't he? It has his picture glued on it. How did you get him on the plane?"

"Easy. I told them my friend is a little queer. He likes to dress up in girls' clothes and get drunk."

Milligan couldn't believe this. "That's insane. You couldn't have made yourself more memorable." Doubt welled up in him like spring water, near freezing. "I want out of this game."

"Relax," Quast said. "Don't be so uptight. Remember, this is all in the family—Vera, Lester, the old man. He's got the dough, he'll fork it over. It's like getting a loan you don't have to pay back." Quast became serious. "Hell, it's Vera's money anyway, she's the oldest. He should give her a lot more

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than he does. Stop worrying and leave all the details to me."

Milligan said, "You're so bush league I can't believe it." But once again, bathing in the radiance of Quast's enthusiasm, he was beginning to feel reassured. Half in jest he said, "I bet you even forgot to mail the letter to Castle Logan."

Quast winked and screwed a finger into Milligan's chest. It hurt. "You lose," he said. "I mailed it yesterday. That was the first thing Vera and I did after I got the idea to hose her old man. We took out the old scissors and glue pot and a copy of the London *Times*."

When Quast went back to his seat, Milligan made himself sleep for the remainder of the flight, a trick he had learned during his baseball days when he was traveling so much of the time. It was more a state of semiconsciousness than proper sleep and Milligan paid a price for it because his mind was free to roll on and feed him all sorts of material he would have screened out if he were awake. They were like dreams, these sessions, except they went on for a long time and their substance was horribly close to reality.

In this trance Deirdre sat with her doctor lover, kissing him and talking seriously about the importance of children in making sense out of a marriage. Then she went away and came back leading their new son who walked with a limp because he had a clubfoot. The scene broadened and they were all sitting in Milligan's Restaurant having a meal during which the doctor pushed away his plate and said he wouldn't eat in this place. He then apologized to Milligan who said humbly, "That's all right," after which Deirdre said not to worry because the restaurant was being closed anyway for lack of funds.

Milligan came fully awake just as Norman Quast was saying he would buy the place and turn it into a jazz club featuring himself on C-Melody saxophone and Vera Logan performing pantomimes with her father, the unforgettable Castle Logan, star of stage, screen, and gas chamber.

They took a taxi from Dorval all the way to Milligan's townhouse on Mountain Street. Lester Logan slept on Quast's shoulder, breathing in a slow even pattern. Noticing a wisp of blonde hair at the edge of the black wig, Vera frowned and tucked it in with a fierce stab of her finger. Milligan could see a white line on the boy's forehead where his sister's fingernail made its mark.

"What did you give him?"

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Milligan muttered, still floating close to sleep. "He's out cold."

Quast sidestepped the question. "Having a much-needed rest," he said.

While Quast paid off the cab driver, Milligan gave Vera the key and sent her ahead to open the door while he got his arms under Lester and carried him up the walk. The boy's cheek rolled against Milligan, smelling of Vera's makeup. He could hear Quast's voice inside the taxi explaining that his girl friend had drunk too much on the plane.

They tucked Lester in bed, fully dressed. Milligan began to make coffee, and Quast went into the bathroom to shave. Vera sat on a kitchen chair and smoked cigarettes.

"What's with you, o silent one?" she said after awhile.

"I'm all right," Milligan said.

"No, you're not," she said. "You hate this whole caper. Kidnaping is against the law and you're a law-abiding citizen."

"I need the money," he said. "I'm in. Don't worry about me."

She accepted a cup of coffee and a shortbread biscuit from the package he opened, apologizing for the fact there was nothing else to eat in the house.

"What are you, Milligan? What do you do?"

"Are you a baseball fan?"

"I could never get interested. My father used to go all the time."

Milligan thought about that. "I used to be a professional baseball player. Until I got hurt."

"I thought only football players got hurt."

"It was an unusual accident. Now I run a restaurant."

She was watching him. "In London I figured you for a drifter. You came on like one in the pub. Now the closer I get to you, the straighter you look."

"Maybe I'm practising to be a drifter," he said.

"I don't think you'll ever make it," she said.

Quast stuck his head in from the bathroom and said, "Where do you keep your after-shave?"

For no particular reason Milligan said, "I drank it." It was in his suitcase, but he didn't feel just then like doing Quast any favors. The men looked at each other in silence and for the first time in two days Quast did not smile.

Vera said, "Use some of my cologne. It's in my shoulder bag on the sofa by the front door."

Quast went away, muttering, "Hell, just a little after-shave."

"What's the matter with him?" Milligan asked.

"He's tired and nervous," Vera said. "We all are."

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"Except Lester. He's sleeping like a baby."

Vera dunked her shortbread in the coffee. "You know something, baseball player?" she said. "With you and my brother it was love at first sight. I've heard about you big masculine athletes. He looks nice in drag, doesn't he?"

"You're one sick woman," Milligan said.

"The truth hurts, doesn't it?" Vera said. "You and my father will get along fine. He loves Lester, too. When I was nine years old and my mother put her head in the gas oven, do you know what my father said to me? He said, 'We've got to find some way to tell Lester without hurting him'." She pushed the coffee aside. "Haven't you got any booze?"

"Just beer." Milligan opened a couple of cans and set one in front of her.

Quast came in and took Vera's can of beer before she could touch it. "Are you still here?" he said to Milligan. "I thought you were on your way to New York."

Vera said, "Norman, I don't think you should drink that beer. You're starting to sound funny."

Quast swallowed half the can, a couple of nicks showing red on his freshly shaved throat as it worked at downing the beer. "Big man with the fists," he said, turning his back on Milligan, taking a few testy steps around the kitchen. "A little after-shave is all I asked for."

"Have you taken your pill?" Vera said. "If you have, you shouldn't drink any more."

"What do you want?" Milligan said. "Shall we call it off?"

"You'd like that," Quast sneered. "Give you a chance to chicken out."

"Both of you stop it," Vera said. "We've brought Lester here, now all we have to do is go and get the money. Let's not start acting stupid."

When Quast finally quit sulking and explained the New York end of the plan to Milligan, it sounded simple enough. Even if it had sounded tough, Milligan would have gone through with it. Vera was right, he hated the whole thing. But he had come this far, and he needed that fifty grand. According to Quast, the ransom letter was frightening enough to make Castle Logan eager to pay. Vera confirmed that her father would not take any risk whatever where Lester's safety was at stake. And she knew for a fact that he always had that kind of cash available.

"It's as easy as taking the collection in church," Quast ended, the up phase of his person-

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ality suddenly taking over again from the down. "Go with confidence, come back with cash. While you're away I'll rent a car. Once we split the loot, Vera and I vanish to California. You take the car and drive Lester to Toronto where you check into any motel. Then you grab a cab to the airport, leaving the kid to wake up and wonder how in hell he got there."

"Lester won't wonder for long," Vera said. "He'll hurry home and Daddy will just be glad he's safe and sound."

"And Logan will never call the police," Quast said, "because he'd have to explain where he got all that undeclared cash."

Milligan walked from the townhouse to the Sheraton Mt. Royal Hotel to catch the limousine back to the airport. Quast, he knew, would have sprung for another eight-dollar cab ride, but this was not Milligan's way. Yet he was perfectly willing to go into the Sunset Bar on the way and set himself up a couple of double Scotches.

He was on his way out again and turning the corner at Maisonneuve and Peel when he ran into Lucien Lacoste, broadly handsome in his blue Constable's uniform, his thick mustache a smooth bar of gleaming black above his slightly arrogant smile.

"Hey, Marty, where have you been? I asked for you in the restaurant, they said they thought you were in Europe."

"Just like Montreal cops," Milligan said. "Always around when you don't need them."

Lacoste studied Milligan's face. "Man, you look bad. Big Marty is not in shape."

"I just got back from England. I heard Deirdre was over there."

"Did you find her?"

"Yeah."

The men stood facing each other but a little off center, looking over each other's shoulder at traffic. A light changed and the normal minimum throb of downtown Montreal shifted up a few notches to a frantic roar. Motorcycles, taxis, buses, sports cars charged past the policeman and his friend.

"You were good last game for the first seven innings," Lacoste said. "We should have won."

"Damn right we should have won. Those were two sweet double plays you turned in the second inning and the fifth."

"Should have had another one in the ninth, if Neil doesn't drop the ball."

"Neil has got to practise his glove work," Milligan said.

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"Work with him, will you, Lucie? Show him how to use the glove."

"Sure." The policeman looked at his watch and said, as if the team schedule was listed there, "I guess we can't win it this year, after losing that one."

"Wait till next year," Milligan said.

Lacoste's face brightened. "Are we sticking together next year? Somebody said there'd be no team."

Milligan put both hands on Lacoste's shoulders and straightened him like a piece of furniture. "Wait till next year," he repeated.

In a way it was like going home for Milligan to fly to New York. On the bus ride from the airport he thought of all the people he could call up if he had the time. Dooner would be glad to hear from him; he had lived at Dooner's house years ago when he was trying to stick with the Mets and it was not yet certain he would make it. Or he could call Max Lowenstein, the art director from the ad agency who took the trouble to telephone Milligan the night after his first appearance in a league game when the Phillies had hit everything he threw and made a real fool of this young Canadian stepping up to the majors with all the glowing press reports behind him. A raucous voice in the stands had yelled, "Go back to Montreal, your arm is still frozen!"—and everybody had laughed at the stupid remark.

After that Milligan felt like a failure and the Met players were letting him alone, wondering if he had the moral fiber to hang in and help the team. Then this stranger called and asked him to come and see where the good jazz was, since he was going to be around New York for a long time and might as well find the right spots.

Milligan and Max Lowenstein had got pleasantly drunk together many times over the next couple of years. And Milligan had gone out once to hang around a film studio in Princeton to watch Max supervise the filming of the title sequence for a TV detective series the agency was behind. He remembered when the actor featured in the filming was asked to take off his shoes before walking on the painted cyclorama, and he had an embarrassing hole in the toe of one sock.

But there was no time on this in-and-out trip to call Dooner or Max or anyone except Castle Logan. And let's hope he has the money ready, Milligan told himself, because I am sure not equipped to hang around in this kind of a situation.

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Castle Logan did have the money. As directed in Quast's letter, he was standing by. And as Vera had predicted, he was eager to pay.

"Cash?" Milligan asked. "In small bills?" He was calling from a pay phone in the lobby of the Roosevelt Hotel.

"Yes. I've done exactly as you said. Where is my son?" Logan's voice sounded angry with offense, like that of a housewife whose grocery delivery is one item short. "I telephoned London and there's no answer."

"Of course there's no answer. We have him."

"Is he all right? How do I know he's safe?"

Following Quast's instructions, Milligan said, "You have no choice, Mr. Logan. You have to take our word. If you hedge, you'll never see your son again. But if you play it straight, believe me he's all right and you'll have him back soon."

"Why should I believe you?"

"You have no choice."

It was ridiculously simple, as Quast and Vera had promised. They knew their man. Logan was to walk into the street with the cash in a suitcase where he would flag a taxi and proceed to a specified intersection, to arrive there precisely in fifteen minutes, at which time the telephone in the booth on the corner would ring. Logan was to answer that phone while the taxi waited.

This was done and Milligan was able to give Logan the other half of his instructions. He was to get back into the taxi and give the driver the address of an apartment building on East 60th Street. When they reached that address, Logan was to get out without paying the driver and, leaving the suitcase of money on the floor of the cab and the back door of the taxi open, he was to run into the apartment building without looking back.

This unlikely procedure took place too, and Milligan was able to step into the abandoned taxi, slam the door, and say to the outraged driver, "It's okay, that's my crazy Uncle Joe. I'll take care of the meter. Drive me to Kennedy."

There were no police cars following as the cab took off for the airport, although Milligan half expected there would be. And there was real money when he opened the suitcase although he half expected to find torn-up pieces of newspaper. It was bizarre. $200,000 for doing almost nothing.

At the airport he called Quast as they had agreed he would.

"All done. I'm ready to fly out."

He heard Quast's excited

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aside to Vera, the voice of a child at a magic show. "He's got it!" Then back into the phone, "Is it all there?"

"I haven't counted it, but it looks like one hell of a lot of tens."

"Okay, now here's what you do. Check the bag at the counter—"

"Check it?"

"That's right. People check luggage every day and they always get it back. Then put the check in an envelope, seal it, write my name on it, and leave it with the girl at the Pan Am counter."

"You mean I come back and the money stays here?"

"Unless you want to try coming through Canadian Customs and Immigration with two hundred thousand bucks in a suitcase."

Milligan said, "When do I get my share?"

"As soon as you get here. I've got your $50,000 waiting for you."

Milligan stood for nearly half a minute watching a 707 take off. Quast's voice in the earpiece was saying, "Marty? Hello? Martin Milligan?"

Finally Milligan said, "Have I got any choice?"

Quast's laugh was shrill with delight. "Sure you have. You can take the whole boodle and get on one of those planes I hear taking off and head for Tahiti."

"That ain't my style, said Casey."

Quast picked it up without missing a beat. "Strike one, the umpire said. Listen, sweetheart, I trusted you, now you trust me. Come home, baby, all is well. We have made a killing."

Milligan felt inclined to make one more phone call, although it was not in the script.

"Mr. Logan?" he said.

"Is that you? Where's my son? You've got your money, when do I see my boy?"

"I just wanted to reassure you that everything is okay. I've been in touch with my associates"—Milligan almost said in Montreal, but checked himself—"in London. They'll release Lester soon and you'll be hearing from him."

"I hope so. If you've harmed one hair of that boy's head, I'll spend every cent I've got to find you."

"Mr. Logan, you've been straight with us, and I want to be straight with you. There was never any intention of harming Lester. I'm sure we've caused you a lot of anguish and I want to apologize."

"Go to hell," Castle Logan said. "I don't want your apologies, I want my son."

On the flight back to

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Montreal, Milligan promised himself not to get into another airplane for a long time. During the brief hour in the air he closed his eyes and thought about Lucien Lacoste's double plays.

Lucie was one sweet shortstop. Milligan had only seen him play in softball games but over quarts of beer in the tavern afterward, as they sat around with the sweat drying on their jerseys, Lucien said that he was on the verge years ago of signing a contract with the St. Louis Cardinals. Milligan could believe this because U.S. scouts were always beating the bushes in French Canada, hoping to turn up another Claude Raymond.

"What happened?" he asked.

Lacoste's eyes flickered. "My father wanted me to stay with the classics course at Jean de Brébeuf College, where I was. I was smart once, eh? You din' know that." Under the influence of the beer Lucien's careful English had deteriorated. "So what happens? I get a girl pregnant, a nice Catholic girl. I leave school to get married, we raise lots of babies, I become a cop. My family is happy, Monique's family is happy. The Church is happy. Everybody is happy."

"Except the Cardinals," Milligan said. "They missed out on a Golden Glove shortstop."

Lucien Lacoste studied the surface of the beer in his glass. "You were up there, Marty. You think I could have made it in the big league?"

"Hell, yes. You could have made it."

They had ended up looking through the pictures in Lacoste's wallet—a bunch of sturdy kids with their arms around Dad's neck, and Milligan had to cough and blame the smoke in the tavern to cover up the tears in his eyes. . .

The airplane landed at Dorval and for the second time in twelve hours Milligan rode in a taxi to the townhouse on Mountain Street. He let himself in with his key and knew instantly that something was wrong.

Vera's bag was not on the sofa. One of her used tissues lay crumpled on the coffee table. Apart from that—nothing. There is a feeling about an empty place, and this was it.

Milligan checked the kitchen—a few more empty beer cans, a full ashtray. He went to the bedroom door and stood outside it, feeling the same rising pounding in his chest he used to feel in the bullpen when the starting pitcher was dying out there and he knew he would be called in.

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"Quast?" he called. "Vera?"

A terrible sense of trouble came over him, a genuine premonition of doom. He told himself he hoped it was all a hoax, that he was the victim along with Castle Logan. He wished as hard as he had ever wished for anything that when he opened the door he would find the room empty—that the boy Lester had been an accomplice in the trick and was now up and gone and laughing in New York, sharing the money with his sister and her boy friend.

He opened the door.

In the shadows he could see the shape on the bed. He walked into the room. It felt cold.

"Lester?"

He leaned over the boy and looked for a sign of life. There was none because the boy was dead, peacefully dead in a black wig and dried lipstick.

The telephone rang.

"Hello?"

Quast's voice came on brisk and cheerful. "Hey, baby, we're right on schedule. We must have passed each other in the air somewhere over Albany."

"He's dead, Quast. What happened?"

Quast put on a Maxwell Smart voice. "Sorry about that, Chief." Then he said, "We had to give him something extra to make sure he wouldn't wake up. He'd be an awful pain in the neck talking about us to the police."

"But what about me?"

"I suggest you get rid of Lester as quickly and as quietly as you can. Unless *you* want to talk to the police. But I don't think you're in a very good position to do that."

Milligan said quietly, "I'm not getting my money either, am I?"

Quast's laugh was exuberant. "That's the first really smart thing I've heard you say. Now, listen. Vera and I have to run. Not to California, that was also a lie. We don't stay in California. And there's no use trying to trace me. Quast is not my real name."

"Listen," Milligan said, "this is crazy. The whole operation has been insane right from the start. Just what am I supposed to do?"

The voice on the phone sounded genuinely concerned. "Martin," it said, "there are quite a few pills left in the bottle in the drawer. Why don't you swallow them and lie down there beside Lester?"

The disconnected phone buzzed in Milligan's ear for ten seconds before he put down the receiver.

There was one beer left in the refrigerator and he drank it as he thought about what to do.

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He was surprised to find that he did not feel frightened. The undercurrent of anxiety which had been trickling through him seemed to have been shut off.

He had to go back into the bedroom to get the suitcase that had been with him to London and back. Some of his dirty laundry was still in it. He threw these things into the wicker hamper beside the bureau, then repacked the bag with fresh shirts, underwear, socks, and a couple of pairs of slacks from the wardrobe. He worked with the light turned off and managed to get through it by telling himself the boy on the bed was asleep.

Back in the living room he checked his wallet for cash. He had been traveling the last couple of days on Quast's money and there was still a hundred of that left plus his credit cards. He could get where he wanted to go. And when he got there, if his hunch was correct—if his bleary half recollection from that distressed London morning was not a dream—then it would be Quast's turn to be surprised.

One last phone call, then one more plane trip. He sat down to dial, every muscle in his body aching with fatigue.

"Hello, is Lucien there?" He waited for Lacoste to come to the phone. "Lucie, it's Marty."

"What's up?"

"Something bad. Now just listen. I want you to come to my place. I won't be here, but I'll leave the door unlocked. In the bedroom you'll find a dead man on the bed."

"Marty, are you drunk?"

"Just listen. Write this down. The dead man is Lester Logan. He's the son of a rich guy in New York. Castle Logan is his name."

"The band leader?"

"That's right. The boy was kidnaped by me and two other people. He wasn't supposed to end up dead, but he has."

Lacoste said, "I can't believe any of this."

"Come and see for yourself," Milligan said. "The other people involved are Logan's daughter Vera and a guy who called himself Quast. Q-U-A-S-T. But that isn't his real name. Have you got all that?"

"*Oui,* yeah, but—"

"Okay. You come here first and then call in your homicide people. Maybe you'll get a promotion out of it. Now I'm cutting out."

"Hey, hey, don't hang up yet—"

"Lucie, I have to split. Listen. Practise making the move to second base, you aren't that good."

"Marty, I'm coming right over."

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"Goodbye, Lucien. Goodbye."

The neighbor in the next townhouse had signed the lease simply because he liked the idea of living next door to the famous Martin Milligan. He was coming in now as Milligan was hurrying out with his suitcase. It seemed incredible to the neighbor that the big baseball player would be crying openly as he strode down the street.

The story was big in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. Milligan bought a copy and read the account as he sat at a mahogany table in the Desire Oyster Bar with an icy glass of beer in front of him.

It was sensational news and the reporters were making a lot out of it: *Millionaire's Kidnaped Son Found Dead In Montreal Apartment Of Former Baseball Star*. Lucien Lacoste was mentioned and quoted as saying he knew Martin Milligan and was sure that once all the facts were known, his involvement would be explained away.

But the reporters liked the idea of the boy being dressed as a woman. Hypothetical questions were asked. How long had he known the baseball star? What was their relationship? Had Lester Logan traveled willingly from London to stay with Milligan, and had he died accidentally from an overdose? In which case, was the kidnaping a hoax?

In New York, Castle Logan was reported to have said he had not seen the man who claimed the money. But he would see him now. In hell. As for his daughter Vera who was implicated by Milligan's statement to officer Lacoste, Logan could only say he had not heard from his daughter in a long time. But yes, he was sorry to say she was capable of something like this. Her mother had been irrational and Vera seemed to have inherited the bad seed.

Quast was a nonentity. Nobody had ever heard of him. Quast might be a figment of Milligan's overwrought imagination, or a cleverly devised red herring intended to complicate the police search.

There was a good picture of Milligan with the story but the photo was 15 years old, showing him lean and tanned in his Mets uniform. Now, heavier, pale and paunchy of face, and wearing the straw hat and dark glasses he had bought yesterday on arrival in New Orleans, Milligan felt he could walk the streets in safety although he knew his time was limited.

The Vieux Carré had interesting streets to walk. Milligan left the bar and kept circulating, scanning the crowds

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for a glimpse of the pair he was looking for. Would they be together? Would they look the same? Milligan was not worried about disguises; something told him he would detect Quast hidden inside a hollow tree. But it had to be soon.

He saw a pair of cops approaching, walking side by side, doing what he was doing. Were they always this attentive on regular duty? Sure they were; they had a whole list of pimps and pushers to be on the lookout for. Even so, Milligan stepped inside a shop and sniffed jasmine-scented candles like any other tourist until the cops had passed by.

By late afternoon he was tired. He sat on a bench in Place d'Armes for a while, watching the raggedest crowd of young people he had ever seen. Their bare feet were bruised and filthy, their overalls had belonged years ago to other people, and in Milligan's weary eyes they appeared to have been inundated with agony and disinterest. One of them stood up and from a paper bag he took crusts of stale bread and threw them to a squadron of clattering pigeons. The birds buzzed the young man, confusing the humid air around him. Finally he threw the bag away, crumbs scattering, and walked away.

Milligan left the park and walked back to Bourbon Street where he sat at the bar in Jean Lafitte's Absinthe House and drank two more beers. He would soon have to eyeball Quast or Vera, or he would run out of time.

There was a TV set above the bar. The evening news came on and Milligan heard again about his house in Montreal and the dead body of Lester Logan. Then he was surprised to see Deirdre's face on the screen. She was being interviewed in London. The setting looked like the same paneled room in which Milligan had almost upset the luncheon table. Where would he be sitting now, he asked himself, if he had done what his heart desired and had taken his fists to young doctor whatever-his-name-was?

Well, he sure as hell would not be in this jeopardy now. But a voice told him to forget it; a murder would have happened a couple of days sooner and he would have committed it.

"Yes, I saw Martin just the day before," Deirdre was saying to the camera. "He'd come to London to talk to me. We're separated, you see." Her face showed satisfied concern.

The announcer's voice asked, "Do you think the fact your marriage has broken up had

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something to do with what Martin Milligan did?"

"Partly. But you must understand Martin's whole life had become a total failure. His restaurant in Montreal is going under. I think he'd become alienated from most of our friends. Then, as you say, he's lost me." One of Deirdre's hands pushed back the cascade of red hair on one side. "And years ago there was his baseball career. It wasn't his fault, of course, but he failed at that too, didn't he? So I suppose he was bound to come to grief. He certainly looked on the brink of something awful when I saw him last."

"Thank you, Mrs. Milligan," the announcer said.

A thought came into his mind from out of nowhere. He paid his tab and as he did so he asked the bartender, "Where is the best place for me to get some shrimp *rémoulade*?"

"Galatoire's," the bartender said. "Just down the street."

Galatoire's looked more like a barbershop to Milligan than a restaurant, with its white enamel woodwork and the yards of mirrors down both sides of the room with brass coat hooks between them. And it was anti-class, he discovered when he ordered a bottle of California chablis and the waiter brought it to him in a yellow plastic bucket of ice water which he sat on the floor beside Milligan's chair. But it was good wine, and the shrimp *rémoulade* was superb, and so was the trout *amandine* and the *crêpes maison* followed by *café brulot*.

Milligan was smiling as he finished the feast. With all he had been drinking in the last couple of days, he had only one foot in the real world. "The condemned man ate a hearty dinner."

The waiter said, "What?"

"A very good dinner," Milligan said, putting money on the table and getting up unsteadily to leave.

Vera Logan was coming in as he was going out. He might have missed her with her hair changed from blonde to black and styled differently, but her reaction to him drew his attention.

"Well now," he said, but she had turned and began to run up the street.

Milligan took off after her, almost lost her in a crowd as he turned a corner, but managed to spot her again on the other side of the road just as she darted into an open doorway.

It was a jazz club called Crazy Annie's. Milligan went in and sat at a table near the door. The place was not very

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crowded at this early hour, but the band was blasting away at *South Rampart Street Parade* just as if it were New Year's Eve.

He soon caught sight of Vera with her back to him at a table near the wall. He took the drink his waiter had brought him and went to sit beside her.

"I didn't know you enjoyed Dixieland," he said. "That gives us one thing on common."

"It bores me," she said. "You're a smart man, Milligan. You got here almost as fast as we did."

"I just figured the team should stick together. Where's Quast?"

"Look around."

There were three other tables with people at them and Quast wasn't at any of them. That left only the band. And there was Quast in the front row, blowing unison riffs on his clarinet with the trumpet player while the trombonist took a solo. Quast had made no attempt to disguise himself. He was wearing a blue blazer with brass buttons over a white shirt and a striped tie and with his tanned face and styled hair, Milligan had to admit he looked like a million dollars. Well, two hundred thousand.

Quast stood up as the trombone player sat down and played a clarinet solo that rated very highly with anything Milligan had ever heard. He didn't have the technique of the pros back at the Metropole in New York, but he had power. He blew the instrument harder than other clarinetists, in short bursts that fitted exactly what the band was doing. The other musicians appreciated it; those who weren't blowing listened and glanced at each other approvingly.

It was the end of the set. Quast left the stand and came to the table. He shook Milligan's hand. Milligan couldn't believe it but there it was, the warm grip of the manager welcoming back his best player at the start of a new season.

"You are one smart man," Quast said.

"I told him he was smart," Vera said.

"I mean getting out of Montreal and keeping so quiet about it. I appreciate it. You remembered New Orleans and you could have told the cops New Orleans. But you didn't. You just took a powder, and I'm going to make that up to you."

"You mean by paying me my fifty thousand."

"More than that. Much more."

"How much more?"

"Half, man. Half of the take. One hundred thousand dollars."

"Keep it, Quast," Milligan

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said. "Or whatever your name is."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm here to blow the whistle on you. I wanted to have the pleasure."

Quast looked straight at Milligan. There was a smile on his face, but the eyes weren't smiling. They were animal eyes, peering out of a dark hole, wondering whether to stay put or make a run for it. "That's crazy," he said. "They'll grab you, too."

"I'm prepared for that. I'll take what's coming. I didn't kill Lester."

"Neither did I," Quast said, "but that's no reason to run to the cops."

"You fink," Vera said. "You rotten stinking fink."

"I like cops," Milligan said. "I always have. They keep the traffic moving outside the ballpark."

"What the hell do you mean?" Quast said.

"Never mind. Come on with me." Milligan stood up, taking Quast's arm in one hand and Vera's in the other. She pulled away and fell back onto her seat. Quast was strong and Milligan sensed he would have his hands full. "All right then, Vera," he said, "stay put. You won't get anywhere by yourself."

Out on the street people backed off as the big man in sunglasses wrestled the man in the blue suit into the middle of the road. A pair of police officers saw the action and approached, walking deliberately. There was a young cop and an older cop.

Milligan spoke to the older cop. "I'm Martin Milligan, wanted in the kidnap murder in Montreal. I'm turning myself in."

The cop said, "Yeah, Milligan. I recognize you."

Quast was standing very still, but his arm was rigidly tensed in Milligan's grip. "And this is the man behind the kidnaping. You'll have to hold onto him—he's not turning himself in."

A movement in the doorway of the club caught Milligan's eye. Vera was out and darting up the street. "That's another one," he yelled. "Vera Logan. Don't lose her."

The young cop took off after the girl just as Quast, taking advantage of the distraction, twisted free and ran in the opposite direction.

Quast was fast. Milligan had trouble keeping him in sight as they raced through the streets with the older cop's running footsteps gradually fading behind them.

They were approaching the park when Milligan heard the

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police siren. Good. They'd soon trap Quast and then Milligan could rest. His out-of-shape lungs were heaving as they had that one time when he had fooled everybody and hit an inside-the-park home run, beating the throw at the plate. They had walked the left fielder intentionally in order to pitch to Milligan. It was a sweet memory.

Now there were other cops in pursuit. He heard yelling, then a whistle blew. Brakes squealed and the siren died like an old crow with a harsh caw.

Quast was just in sight at the far side of the park, heading for a gate. Milligan put on a desperate burst of speed.

A voice behind yelled, "Stop right there!" and at the same time a gun was fired. Milligan felt a punch in his back and stumbled, the grass floating up to buffet his face.

Somebody turned him over. He felt as though he could open his eyes if he wanted to, but he decided to just leave them closed. He heard bits of what was being said above him.

"Why did you have to shoot him?" It sounded like the older cop. "He was giving himself up. It was the other guy."

"He was running away. We'll get the other guy. There's three cars on the other side of the park."

"I got the girl." The young cop's voice.

An ambulance siren. They were lifting Milligan onto a stretcher.

"He was a great ballplayer," the older cop said. "I saw him strike out Marbeck three times in one game."

After that third strikeout you couldn't hear yourself think in the stadium. Forty thousand people were standing up and applauding when Milligan left the mound and walked toward the dugout. As he crossed the third-base line, he lifted his cap.

It was Milligan's last sweet memory.

"Q"

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first publication in the United States

Another vignette about the Amsterdam detective, Van der Valk . . . in which Van der Valk and his wife Arlette are on vacation in Ireland, and the detective makes an unusual discovery . . .

VAN DER VALK AND THE SPANISH GALLEON

by NICOLAS FREELING

"Wonderful country," said Van der Valk, climbing the hill. "No inhabitants, no tourists—too barren for the one and too cold and gloomy for the other. Hostile—even sinister."

"The light is amazing." Arlette, his wife, was picking flowers. "These hills—the wettest gray you could think of, and at sunset they go pink, dark red, then an incredible violet."

"Look." They had come out in a shallow circular valley, closed in on all sides by the bare limestone. "Not a soul there—but full of eyes, looking."

"These are alpines," said Arlette excitedly, "a kind I've never seen anywhere!"

"The whole place is full of surprises. Also witches—anything can happen. I think I might take a swim this afternoon."

"No sun—no sun ever. Too cold." Arlette's voice was discouraging, but she came from the faraway Mediterranean.

"It'll never get any warmer. Water at fifteen degrees even in August—but I'll wear the skinsuit." The rubber diving-suit had been bought just before they went on holiday, to go with his treasured aqualung. It was the first time either of

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them had been in Ireland. "The thing is, the water's perfectly clean and amazingly clear. There are oysterbeds in that creek—they told me—and it's full of lobsters, bass, sea trout—they never even try to catch them, let alone eat them."

"I wonder if the pub's got blotting paper—I want to press these flowers. They fade while you watch."

"We'll go back—I'm just beginning to feel the call of that whiskey."

The pub was the center of the village and its harbor where there had been no fishingboat for twenty years. It sold stamps, the tinned salmon the local people preferred to fresh, and amazing whiskey. There was a stone floor and two wooden benches. The postmistress served them, a comfortable woman with few teeth but a happy smile, who went into gales of laughter whenever she saw them. Since their arrival they had drunk tremendously, which made Van der Valk's English fluent and his jokes funny.

While Arlette pressed her flowers he rolled up his trousers. Low tide—he was sure he would find oysters in the tidepools broken loose by the last storm—and sure enough he came back with a bucketful. Three wizened farmers drinking stout watched with fascinated disapproval while Van der Valk opened the oysters with his pocketknife.

"Got any bread, my dear? And butter, too? Lovely." They settled down to eat while the others shook their heads in horror. "What's for dinner? Mutton stew? Put the rest in with it." This notion the locals simply refused to swallow.

"I'll bet my pension there's lobsters in those rocks in the creek."

"Yeah—old Matt; he gets them, he eats them. Nobody else."

"Not now" —this appeared to be "old Matt"—"tide's not low enough for 'nother week."

"I'll dive for them—I've got a breathing apparatus," said Van der Valk. The others were entranced; he had to get the aqualung to show them.

"D'ya know about the galleon?"

"No. Tell me," said Van der Valk.

"Out by the point—water's deep there. Back in the days of the Spaniards. Nobody ever found her. All full of treasure and such."

"So? I'll dive for her." The others grinned with delight, but the postmistress clucked anxiously.

"Sure, they're pulling your

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leg. They always do that. Sure, it's only foolishness an' fairytales." But Van der Valk, bold with whiskey, paid no heed, and bought them all drinks, full of respectful attention while they gave him full details; the locals were enjoying themselves greatly and particularly emphatic about the need to look out for sharks.

At that the postmistress got quite indignant, begging Arlette to disregard such nonsense, bothered evidently that these "foreigners" would be angry when they learned that a mockery was being made of them.

Out by the point it was gray and still, with the water oily and a thin summer fog hanging over it. Out of the auto came a lot of towels and maps, apples and sweaters, before Van der Valk found the depth meter and strapped it on his wrist.

"You're really going down there? It'll be awfully cold."

"Water's warmer than the air." He waded across blackish sand and crossed weed-hung rock. "Gets deep here."

And then he was gone. Arlette watched the bubbles a few moments before going to hunt for driftwood. With some dried seaweed and lighter fluid she made a fire good enough to grill lobsters on—that was all he'd find! He was gone a long time but she was not frightened; Van der Valk was an experienced diver.

When he came up he was holding only the big torch. He seemed still and thoughtful as he stripped, then wound himself in a large towel and smoked a cigarette by the fire. It was very quiet; there were ruins out here by the point, and nobody lived there.

"Nothing, of course?" Arlette asked.

"Oh, yes, I found the galleon. Have you seen anybody?"

"I did think I saw someone over there by the rocks, but whoever it was went away again."

"Let's get back."

The postmistress was not in the pub and grandpa served them, a decrepit old chap with even less teeth than his daughter, who clashed the glass shakily against the bottle. The postmistress got back while they were drinking.

"We found the galleon," Van der Valk remarked pleasantly.

"You did?"

She was suddenly shaking as badly as grandpa.

"Have some whiskey. Who wrecked her—grandpa? . . . No," Van der Valk said, watching her drink, "it isn't necessarily my business. I had quite a swim. Got no air left either —have to think of those lob-

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sters another time. Better be getting back now—come on, Arlette."

"What did you mean—not wrecked by grandpa?" Arlette asked outside.

"Not wrecked—sunk. They'd come up for a chat—they had the hatch open—they were with someone they considered a reliable pal—and got double-crossed. As far as I could judge, whoever did it tossed a grenade down the hatch."

"But how did you know?"

"The others were all enjoying themselves, so why should she have got so bothered at their making fun of me? They knew nothing—but obviously she did."

"But I still don't understand. Tossed a grenade down the *hatch*—of a *galleon*?"

"Sorry. Of course not—not a galleon. A submarine."

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a mystery story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Here is one of Agatha Christie's rare tales of the supernatural, of the occult—or are the things we call supernatural, as Dr. Rose says in this story, necessarily supernatural at all? Isn't what we call supernatural only the natural *whose laws are not yet understood? A fascinating "case"...*

THE HOUND OF DEATH

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

It was from William P. Ryan, American newspaper correspondent, that I first heard of the affair. I was dining with him in London on the eve of his return to New York and happened to mention that on the morrow I was going down to Folbridge.

He looked up and said sharply, "Folbridge, Cornwall?"

Now only one person in a thousand knows that there is a Folbridge in Cornwall. They always take it for granted that the Folbridge, Hampshire, is meant. So Ryan's knowledge aroused my curiosity.

"Yes," I said. "Do you know it?"

He merely replied that he was darned. He then asked if I happened to know a house called Trearne down there.

My interest increased.

"Very well indeed. In fact, it's to Trearne I'm going. It's my sister's house."

"Well," said William P. Ryan. "If that doesn't beat the band!"

I suggested that he should cease making cryptic remarks and explain himself.

"Well," he said. "To do that I shall have to go back to an experience of mine at the beginning of the war."

I sighed. The events which I am relating took place in 1921. To be reminded of the war was the last thing any man wanted. We were, thank God, beginning to forget... Besides, William P. Ryan on his war experiences was apt, as I knew, to be unbelievably long-winded.

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But there was no stopping him now.

"At the start of the war, as you no doubt know, I was in Belgium for my paper—moving about some. Well, there's a little village—I'll call it X. A one-horse place if there ever was one, but there's quite a big convent there. Nuns in white, what do you call 'em—I don't know the name of the order. Anyway, it doesn't matter. Well, this little burg was right in the line of the German advance. The Uhlans arrived—"

I shifted uneasily. William P. Ryan lifted a hand reassuringly.

"It's all right," he said. "This isn't a German atrocity story. As a matter of fact, the boot's on the other leg. The Huns made for that convent—they got there and the whole thing blew up."

"Oh!" I said, rather startled.

"Odd business, wasn't it? Of course, offhand, I should say the Huns had been celebrating and had monkeyed round with their own explosives. But it seems they hadn't anything of that kind with them. They weren't the high-explosive johnnies. Well, then, I ask you, what would a pack of nuns know about high explosive? Some nuns, I should say!"

"It is odd," I agreed.

"I was interested in hearing the peasants' account of the matter. They'd got it all cut and dried. According to them it was a slap-up, one hundred percent, first-class modern miracle. It seems one of the nuns had got something of a reputation—a budding saint—went into trances and saw visions. And according to them she worked the stunt. She called down the lightning to blast the impious Hun—and it blasted him all right—and everything else within range. A pretty efficient miracle, that!

"I never really got at the truth of the matter—hadn't time. But miracles were all the rage just then—angels at Mons and all that. I wrote up the thing, put in a bit of sob stuff, and pulled the religious stop out well, and sent it to my paper. It went down very well in the States. They were liking that kind of thing just then.

"But—I don't know if you'll understand this—in writing, I got kind of interested. I felt I'd like to know what really *had* happened. There was nothing to see at the spot itself. Two walls still left standing, and on one of them was a black powder mark that was the exact shape of a great hound. The peasants around were scared to death of that mark. They called it the Hound of Death and wouldn't pass that way after dark.

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"Superstition's always interesting. I felt I'd like to see the lady who worked the stunt. She hadn't perished, it seemed. She'd gone to England with a batch of other refugees. I took the trouble to trace her and found she'd been sent to Trearne, Folbridge, Cornwall."

I nodded.

"My sister took in a lot of Belgian refugees at the beginning of the war. About twenty."

"Well, I always meant, if I had time, to look up the lady. I wanted to hear her own account of the disaster. Then, what with being busy and one thing and another, it slipped my memory. Cornwall's a bit out of the way anyhow. In fact, I'd forgotten it till your mentioning Folbridge brought it back."

"I must ask my sister," I said. "She may have heard something about it. Of course, the Belgians have all been repatriated long ago."

"Naturally. All the same, in case your sister does know anything I'd be glad if you'd pass it on to me."

"Of course I will," I said heartily.

And that was that.

It was the second day after my arrival at Trearne that the story recurred to me. My sister and I were having tea on the terrace.

"Kitty," I said, "didn't you have a nun among your Belgians?"

"You don't mean Sister Marie Angelique, do you?"

"Possibly I do," I said cautiously. "Tell me about her."

"Oh, my dear, she was the most uncanny creature. She's still here, you know."

"What? In the house?"

"No, no, in the village. Dr. Rose—you remember Dr. Rose?"

I shook my head. "I remember an old man of about eighty-three."

"Dr. Laird. Oh, he died. Dr. Rose has only been here a few years. He's quite young and very keen on new ideas. He took the most enormous interest in Sister Marie Angelique. She has hallucinations and things, you know, and apparently is most frightfully interesting from a medical point of view. Poor thing, she'd nowhere to go—and really was in my opinion quite potty—only impressive, if you know what I mean. Well, as I say, she'd nowhere to go, and Dr. Rose very kindly fixed her up in the village. I believe he's writing a monograph, or whatever it is that doctors write, about her."

She paused and then said, "But what do you know about her?"

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"I heard a rather curious story."

I passed on the story as I had received it from Ryan. Kitty was very much interested.

"She looks the sort of person who could blast you—if you know what I mean," she said.

"I really think," I said, my curiosity heightened, "that I must see this young woman."

"Do. I'd like to know what you think of her. Go and see Dr. Rose first. Why not walk down to the village after tea?"

I accepted the suggestion.

I found Dr. Rose at home and introduced myself. He seemed a pleasant young man, yet there was something about his personality that rather repelled me. It was too forceful to be altogether agreeable.

The moment I mentioned Sister Marie Angelique he stiffened to attention. He was evidently keenly interested. I gave him Ryan's account of the matter.

"Ah," he said thoughtfully. "That explains a great deal."

He looked up quickly at me and went on.

"The case is really an extraordinarily interesting one. The woman arrived here having evidently suffered some severe mental shock. She was in a state of great mental excitement also. She was given to hallucinations of a most startling character. Her personality is most unusual. Perhaps you would like to come with me and call upon her. She is really well worth seeing."

I agreed readily.

We set out together. Our objective was a small cottage on the outskirts of the village. Folbridge is a most picturesque place. It lies in the mouth of the river Fol, mostly on the east bank; the west bank is too precipitous for building, though a few cottages do cling to the cliffside there. The doctor's own cottage was perched on the extreme edge of the cliff on the west side. From it you looked down on the big waves lashing against the black rocks.

The little cottage to which we were now proceeding lay inland out of sight of the sea.

"The district nurse lives here," explained Dr. Rose. "I have arranged for Sister Marie Angelique to board with her. It is just as well that she should be under skilled supervision."

"Is she quite normal in her manner?" I asked curiously.

"You can judge for yourself in a minute," he replied.

The district nurse, a dumpy pleasant little body, was just setting out on her bicycle when we arrived.

"Good evening, nurse, how's your patient?" called out the doctor.

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"She's much as usual, Doctor. Just sitting there with her hands folded and her mind far away. Often enough she'll not answer when I speak to her, though for the matter of that it's little enough English she understands even now."

Dr. Rose nodded, and as the nurse bicycled away, he went up to the cottage door, rapped sharply, and entered.

Sister Marie Angelique was lying in a long chair near the window. She turned her head.

It was a strange face—pale, with enormous eyes. There seemed to be an infinitude of tragedy in those eyes.

"Good evening, my sister," said the doctor in French.

"Good evening, *M. le docteur*."

"Permit me to introduce a friend, Mr. Anstruther."

I bowed and she inclined her head with a faint smile.

"And how are you today?" inquired the doctor, sitting down beside her.

"I am much the same as usual." She paused and then went on. "Nothing seems real to me. Are they days that pass—or months—or years? I hardly know. Only my dreams seem real to me."

"You still dream a lot, then?"

"Always—always—and, you understand?—the dreams seem more real than life."

"You dream of your own country—of Belgium?"

She shook her head.

"No. I dream of a country that never existed—never. But you know this, *M. le docteur*. I have told you many times." She stopped and then said abruptly, "But perhaps this gentleman is also a doctor—a doctor perhaps for the diseases of the brain?"

"No, no." Rose was reassuring, but as he smiled I noticed how extraordinarily pointed his canine teeth were, and it occurred to me that there was something wolflike about the man.

He went on, "I thought you might be interested to meet Mr. Anstruther. He knows something of Belgium. He has lately been hearing news of your convent."

Her eyes turned to me. A faint flush crept into her cheeks.

"It's nothing, really," I hastened to explain. "But I was dining the other evening with a friend who was describing the ruined walls of the convent to me."

"So it was ruined!"

It was a soft exclamation, uttered more to herself than to us. Then looking at me once more, she asked hesitatingly, "Tell me, Monsieur, did your friend say how—in what way—it was ruined?"

"It was blown up," I said, and

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added, "The peasants are afraid to pass that way at night."

"Why are they afraid?"

"Because of a black mark on a ruined wall. They have a superstitious fear of it."

She leaned forward.

"Tell me, Monsieur—quick—quick—tell me! What is that mark like?"

"It has the shape of a huge hound," I answered. "The peasants call it the Hound of Death."

"Ah!"

A shrill cry burst from her lips.

"It is true then—it is true. All that I remember is true. It is not some black nightmare. It happened! It happened!"

"What happened, my sister?" asked the doctor in a low voice.

She turned to him eagerly.

"*I remembered.* There on the steps, I remembered. I remembered the way of it. I used the power as we used to use it. I stood on the altar steps and I bade them come no farther. I told them to depart in peace. They would not listen, they came on although I warned them. And so—" She leaned forward and made a curious gesture. "And so I loosed the Hound of Death on them."

She lay back on her chair shivering, her eyes closed.

The doctor rose, fetched a glass from a cupboard, half filled it with water, added a drop or two from a little bottle which he produced from his pocket, then took the glass to her.

"Drink this," he said authoritatively.

She obeyed—mechanically, it seemed. Her eyes looked far away as though they contemplated some inner vision of her own.

"But then it is all true," she said. "Everything. The City of the Circles, the People of the Crystal—everything. It is all true."

"It would seem so," said Rose.

His voice was low and soothing, clearly designed to encourage her train of thought.

"Tell me about the City," he said. "The City of the Circles, I think you said?"

She answered absently.

"Yes—there were three circles. The first circle for the chosen, the second for the priestesses, and the outer circle for the priests."

"And in the center?"

She drew her breath sharply and her voice sank to a tone of indescribable awe.

"The House of the Crystal."

As she breathed the words, her right hand went to her forehead and her finger traced some figure there.

Her figure seemed to grow more rigid, her eyes closed, she swayed a little—then suddenly

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she sat upright with a jerk, as though she had suddenly awakened.

"What is it?" she said confusedly. "What have I been saying?"

"It is nothing," said Rose. "You are tired. You want to rest. We will leave you."

She seemed a little dazed as we took our departure.

"Well," said Rose when we were outside. "What do you think of it?"

He shot a sharp glance sideways at me.

"I suppose her mind must be totally unhinged," I said slowly.

"It struck you like that?"

"No—as a matter of fact, she was—well, curiously convincing. When listening to her I had the impression that she actually had done what she claimed to do—worked a kind of gigantic miracle. Her belief that she did so seems genuine enough. That is why—"

"That is why you say her mind must be unhinged. Quite so. But now approach the matter from another angle. Supposing that she did actually work that miracle—supposing that she did, personally, destroy a building and several hundred human beings."

"By the mere exercise of will?" I said with a smile.

"I should not put it quite like that. You will agree that one person could destroy a multitude by touching a switch which controlled a system of mines."

"Yes, but that is mechanical."

"True, that is mechanical, but it is, in essence, the harnessing and controlling of natural forces. The thunderstorm and the powerhouse are, fundamentally, the same thing."

"Yes, but to control the thunderstorm we have to use mechanical means."

Rose smiled. "I am going off at a tangent now. There is a substance called wintergreen. It occurs in nature in vegetable form. It can also be built up by man synthetically and chemically in the laboratory."

"Well?"

"My point is that there are often two ways of arriving at the same result. Ours is, admittedly, the synthetic way. There might be another. The extraordinary results arrived at by Indian fakirs, for instance, cannot be explained away in any easy fashion. The things we call supernatural are not necessarily supernatural at all. An electric flashlight would be supernatural to a savage. The supernatural is only the natural of which the laws are not yet understood."

"You mean?" I asked, fascinated.

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"That I cannot entirely dismiss the possibility that a human being *might* be able to tap some vast destructive force and use it to further his or her ends. The means by which this was accomplished might seem to us supernatural—but would not be so in reality."

I stared at him.

He laughed.

"It's a speculation, that's all," he said lightly. "Tell me, did you notice a gesture she made when she mentioned the House of the Crystal?"

"She put her hand to her forehead."

"Exactly. And traced a circle there. Very much as a Catholic makes the sign of the cross. Now, I will tell you something rather interesting, Mr. Anstruther. The word crystal having occurred so often in my patient's rambling, I tried an experiment. I borrowed a crystal from someone and produced it unexpectedly one day to test my patient's reaction to it."

"Well?"

"Well, the result was very curious and suggestive. Her whole body stiffened. She stared at it as though unable to believe her eyes. Then she slid to her knees in front of it, murmured a few words—and fainted."

"What were the few words?"

"Very curious ones. She said, *'The Crystal! Then the Faith still lives!'* "

"Extraordinary!"

"Suggestive, is it not? Now the next curious thing. When she came around from her faint she had forgotten the whole thing. I showed her the crystal and asked her if she knew what it was. She replied that she supposed it was a crystal such as fortunetellers used. I asked her if she had ever seen one before. She replied, 'Never, *M. le docteur.*'

"But I saw a puzzled look in her eyes. 'What troubles you, my sister?' I asked. She replied: 'Because it is so strange. I have never seen a crystal before and yet—it seems to me that I know it well. There is something—if only I could remember . . .' The effort at memory was obviously so distressing to her that I forbade her to think any more. That was two weeks ago. I have purposely been biding my time. Tomorrow I shall proceed to a further experiment."

"With the crystal?"

"With the crystal. I shall get her to gaze into it. I think the result ought to be interesting."

"What do you expect?" I asked curiously.

The words were idle ones but they had an unlooked-for result. Rose stiffened, flushed, and his manner when he spoke had changed. It was more for-

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mal, more professional.

"Light on certain mental disorders imperfectly understood. Sister Marie Angelique is a most interesting study."

So Rose's interest was purely professional? I wondered.

"Do you mind if I come along, too?" I asked.

It may have been my fancy, but I thought he hesitated before he replied. I had a sudden intuition that he did not want me.

"Certainly. I can see no objection."

He added, "I suppose you're not going to be down here very long?"

"Only till the day after tomorrow."

I thought the answer pleased him. His brow cleared and he began talking of some recent experiments he had carried out on guinea pigs.

I met the doctor by appointment the following afternoon, and we went together to Sister Marie Angelique. Today the doctor was all geniality. He was anxious, I thought, to efface the impression he had made the day before.

"You must not take what I said too seriously," he observed, laughing. "I shouldn't like you to believe me a dabbler in occult sciences. The worst of me is I have an infernal weakness for making out a case."

"Really?"

"Yes, and the more fantastic it is, the better I like it."

He laughed as a man laughs at an amusing weakness.

When we arrived at the cottage, the district nurse had something she wanted to consult Rose about, so I was left alone with Sister Marie Angelique.

I saw her scrutinizing me closely. Presently she spoke.

"The good nurse here, she tells me that you are the brother of the kind lady at the big house where I was brought when I came from Belgium?"

"Yes," I said.

"She was very kind to me. She is good."

She was silent, as though following some train of thought. Then she said, "*M. le docteur*, he too is a good-man?"

I was a little embarrassed.

"Why, yes. I mean—I think so."

"Ah!" She paused and then said, "Certainly he has been very kind to me."

"I'm sure he has."

She looked up at me sharply.

"Monsieur—you—you who speak to me now—do you believe I am mad?"

"Why, my sister, such an idea never—"

She shook her head slowly, interrupting my protest. "Am I

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mad? I do not know—the things I remember—the things I forget—"

She sighed, and at that moment Rose entered the room.

He greeted her cheerily and explained what he wanted her to do.

"Certain people, you see, have a gift for seeing things in a crystal. You might have such a gift, my sister."

She looked distressed. "No, no, I cannot do that. To try to read the future—that surely is sinful."

Rose was taken aback. It was the nun's point of view for which he had not allowed. He changed his ground cleverly.

"One should not look into the future. You are quite right. But to look into the past—that is different."

"The past?"

"Yes—there are many strange things in the past. Flashes come back to one—they are seen for a moment—then gone again. Do not seek to see anything in the crystal since that it not allowed you. Just take it in your hands—so. Look into it—look deep. Yes—deeper—deeper still. You remember, do you not? You remember. You hear me speaking to you. You can answer my questions. Can you not hear me?"

Sister Marie Angelique had taken the crystal as bidden, handling it with a curious reverence. Then, as she gazed into it, her eyes became blank and unseeing, and her head drooped. She seemed to sleep.

Gently the doctor took the crystal from her and put it on the table. He raised the corner of her eyelid. Then he came and sat by me.

"We must wait till she wakes. It won't be long."

He was right. At the end of five minutes Sister Marie Angelique stirred. Her eyes opened dreamily.

"Where am I?"

"You are here—at home. You have had a little sleep. You have dreamed, have you not?"

She nodded.

"Yes, I have dreamed."

"You have dreamed of the Crystal?"

"Yes."

"Tell us about it."

"You will think me mad, *M. le docteur*. For you see, in my dream the Crystal was a holy emblem. I even thought to myself a second Christ, a Teacher of the Crystal who died for his faith, his followers hunted down—persecuted . . . But the faith endured."

"The faith endured?"

"Yes—for fifteen thousand full moons—I mean, for fifteen thousand years."

"How long was a full moon?"

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"Thirteen ordinary moons. Yes, it was in the fifteen-thousandth full moon—of course, I was a Priestess of the Fifth Sign in the House of the Crystal. It was in the first days of the coming of the Sixth Sign . . ."

Her brows drew together, a look of fear passing her eyes.

"Too soon," she murmured. "Too soon. A mistake . . . Ah, yes, I remember! The Sixth Sign!"

She half sprang to her feet, then dropped back, murmuring, "But what am I saying? I am raving. These things never happened."

"Now don't distress yourself, my sister."

But she was looking at him in anguished perplexity.

"*M. le docteur*, I do not understand. Why should I have these dreams, these fancies? I was only sixteen when I entered the religious life. I have never traveled. Yet I dream of cities, of strange people, of strange customs. Why?" She pressed both hands to her head.

"Have you ever been hypnotized, my sister? Or been in a state of trance?"

"I have never been hypnotized, *M. le docteur*. For the other, when at prayer in the chapel, my spirit has often been caught up from my body, and I have been as one dead for many hours. It was undoubtedly a blessed state, the Reverend Mother said—a state of grace. Ah, yes," she caught her breath. "*I remember, we too called it a state of grace.*"

"I would like to try an experiment, my sister." Dr. Rose spoke in a matter-of-fact voice. "It may dispel those painful half recollections. I will ask you to gaze once more in the crystal. I will then say a certain word to you. You will answer with another. We will continue in this way until you become tired. Concentrate your thoughts on the crystal, not on the words."

As I once more unwrapped the crystal and gave it into Sister Marie Angelique's hands, I noticed the reverent way her hands touched it. Reposing on the black velvet, it lay between her slim palms. Her wonderful deep eyes gazed into it. There was a short silence, and then the doctor said, "*Hound*."

Immediately Sister Marie Angelique answered, "*Death*."

I do not propose to give a full account of the experiment. Many unimportant and meaningless words were purposely introduced by the doctor. Other words he repeated several times, sometimes getting the same answer to them, sometimes a different one.

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That evening in the doctor's little cottage on the cliffs we discussed the result of the experiment.

He cleared his throat and drew his notebook closer to him.

"These results are very interesting—very curious. In answer to the words 'Sixth Sign,' we get variously *Destruction, Purple, Hound, Power,* then again *Destruction,* and finally *Power*. Later, as you may have noticed, I reversed the method, with the following results. In answer to *Destruction*, I get *Hound*; to *Purple, Power*; to *Hound, Death* again, and to *Power, Hound*. That all holds together, but on a second repetition of *Destruction,* I get *Sea*, which appears utterly irrelevant.

"To the words 'Fifth Sign,' I get *Blue, Thoughts, Bird, Blue* again, and finally the rather suggestive phrase *Opening of mind to mind*. From the fact that 'Fourth Sign' elicits the word *Yellow*, and later *Light*, and that 'First Sign' is answered by *Blood*, I deduce that each Sign had a particular color, and possibly a particular symbol, that of the Fifth Sign being a *bird*, and that of the Sixth a *hound*. However, I surmise that the Fifth Sign represented what is familiarly known as telepathy—the opening of mind to mind. The Sixth Sign undoubtedly stands for the Power of Destruction."

"What is the meaning of *Sea*?"

"That I confess I cannot explain. I introduced the word later and got the ordinary answer of *Boat*. To 'Seventh Sign' I got first *Life,* the second time *Love*. To 'Eighth Sign,' I got the answer *None*. I take it therefore that Seven was the sum and number of the signs."

"But the Seventh was not achieved," I said on a sudden inspiration. "Since through the Sixth came *Destruction*!"

"Ah, you think so? But we are taking these—mad ramblings very seriously. They are really only interesting from a medical point of view."

"Surely they will attract the attention of psychic investigators."

The doctor's eyes narrowed. "My dear sir, I have no intention of making them public."

"Then your interest?"

"Is purely personal. I shall make notes on the case, of course."

"I see." But for the first time I felt, like the blind man, that I didn't see at all. I rose to my feet.

"Well, I'll wish you good night, Doctor. I'm off to town again tomorrow."

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"Ah!" I fancied there was satisfaction, relief perhaps, behind the exclamation.

"I wish you good luck with your investigations," I continued lightly. "Don't loose the Hound of Death on me next time we meet!"

His hand was in mine as I spoke, and I felt the start it gave. He recovered himself quickly. His lips drew back from his long pointed teeth in a smile.

"For a man who loved power, what a power that would be!" he said. "To hold every human being's life in the hollow of your hand!"

And his smile broadened.

That was the end of my direct connection with the affair.

Later, the doctor's notebook and diary came into my hands. I will reproduce the few entries in it here, though you will understand that it did not really come into my possession until some time afterward.

Aug. 5th. Have discovered that by "the Chosen," Sister M.A. means those who reproduced the race. Apparently they were held in the highest honor, and exalted above the Priesthood. Contrast this with early Christians.

Aug. 7th. Persuaded Sister M.A. to let me hypnotize her. Succeeded in inducing hypnotic sleep and trance, but no *rapport* established.

Aug. 9th. Have there been civilizations in the past to which ours is as nothing? Strange if it should be so, and I the only man with the clue to it.

Aug. 12th. Sister M.A. not at all amenable to suggestion when hypnotized. Yet state of trance easily induced. Cannot understand it.

Aug. 13th. Sister M.A. mentioned today that in "state of grace" the "gate must be closed, lest another should command the body." Interesting—but baffling.

Aug. 18th. So the First Sign is none other than *(words erased here)*. Then how many centuries will it take to reach the Sixth? But if there should be a short cut to Power . . .

Aug. 20th. Have arranged for M.A. to come here with the nurse. Have told her it is necessary to keep patient under morphia. Am I mad? Or shall I be the Superman—the Superman with the Power of Death in my hands?

(Here the entries cease)

It was, I think, on August 29th that I received the letter. It was directed to me, care of my sister, in a sloping foreign handwriting. I opened it with some curiosity. It ran as

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follows:

"CHER MONSIEUR, I have seen you but twice, but I have felt that I could trust you. Whether my dreams are real or not, they have grown clearer of late . . . And, Monsieur, one thing at all events, the Hound of Death is no dream . . . In the days I told you of (whether they are real or not, I do not know) He Who Was Guardian of the Crystal revealed the Sixth Sign to the People too soon . . . Evil entered into their hearts. They had the power to slay at will—and they slew without justice—in anger. They were drunk with the lust of Power.

"When we saw this, we who were yet pure, we knew that once again we should not complete the Circle and come to the Sign of Everlasting Life. He who would have been the next Guardian of the Crystal was bidden to act. That the old might die, and the new, after endless ages, might come again, *he loosed the Hound of Death upon the sea* (being careful not to close the Circle), and the sea rose up in the shape of a Hound and swallowed the land . . .

"Once before I remembered this—*on the altar steps in Belgium* . . .

"The Dr. Rose, he is of the Brotherhood. He knows the First Sign, and the form of the Second, though its meaning is hidden to all save a chosen few. *He would learn of me the Sixth.* I have withstood him so far—but I grow weak. Monsieur, it is not well that a man should come to power before his time. Many centuries must go by ere the world is ready to have the Power of Death delivered into its hand . . . I beseech of you, Monsieur, you who love goodness and truth, to help me . . . before it is too late.

"Your sister in Christ,

"MARIE ANGELIQUE."

I let the paper fall. The solid earth beneath me seemed a little less solid than usual. Then I began to rally. The poor woman's belief, genuine enough, had almost affected *me*! One thing was clear. Dr. Rose, in his zeal for a case, was grossly abusing his professional standing. I would run down and—

Suddenly I noticed a letter from Kitty among my other correspondence.

I tore it open.

"Such an awful thing has happened," I read. "You remember Dr. Rose's little cottage on the cliff? It was swept away by a landslide last night, and the doctor and that poor nun, Sister Marie Angèlique, were killed. The debris on the beach is too awful—all piled up in a fantastic mass—from a distance it looks like a great *hound* . . ."

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The letter dropped from my hand.

The other facts may be coincidence. A Mr. Rose, whom I discovered to be a wealthy relative of the doctor's, died suddenly that same night—it was said struck by lightning. As far as was known no thunderstorm had occurred in the neighborhood, but one or two people declared they had heard one peal of thunder. He had an electric burn on him "of a curious shape."

His will left everything to his nephew, Dr. Rose.

Now, supposing that Dr. Rose succeeded in obtaining the secret of the Sixth Sign from Sister Marie Angelique. I had always felt him to be an unscrupulous man—he would not shrink at taking a relative's life if he were sure it could not be brought home to him. But one sentence of Sister Marie Angelique's letter rings in my brain: ". . . being careful not to close the Circle . . ." Dr. Rose did not exercise that care—was perhaps unaware of the steps to take, or even of the need for them. So the Force he employed returned, completing its circuit . . .

But of course it is all nonsense! Everything can be accounted for quite naturally. That the doctor believed in Sister Marie Angelique's hallucinations merely proves that *his* mind, too, was slightly unbalanced.

Yet sometimes I dream of a continent under the seas where men once lived and attained to a degree of civilization far ahead of ours . . .

Or did Sister Marie Angelique remember *backwards*—as some say is possible—and is this City of the Circles in the future and not in the past?

Nonsense—of course the whole thing was mere hallucination!

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

So long as we still have at least half a dozen mystery mongers who combine ingenuity with fair play, the noble craft of the detective novel is in no danger. Otherwise their methods vary, as indeed methods should. And the writers of espionage thrillers, though bound by few rules, may well adopt some part of the same technique.

Four new items this month, two detective and two espionage, seem to bear out the not-very-profound remarks above. Let me try to demonstrate my point.

In Emma Lathen's *By Hook or By Crook* (Simon and Schuster, $6.95), an expertly planned crime once more forces the dignified old Sloan Guaranty Trust into indignities from which it must be rescued by John Putnam Thatcher, its senior vice-president.

At once we become embroiled in the troubles of Parajians, Inc., those famous (and dignified) importers of Oriental rugs, whose founder, Paul Parajian, rules his relentlessly squabbling family. All our Sloan friends are within call—Everett Gabler, Charlie Trinkham, ultra-correct Miss Corsa—when a woman claiming to be Paul Parajian's sister is poisoned soon after she has landed in New York.

But that's only for openers. With kindly satire, with a keen eye for irony, the author studies emotional pressures through another murder, through the great auction at Parajian's, until Thatcher gathers up every clue in as fine a detective story as Emma Lathen has written.

Recalling events all too real, *Time of Terror*, by Hugh Pentecost (Dodd, Mead, $5.95), postulates a suite in Manhattan's luxury Hotel Beaumont taken over by murderous hoods calling themselves the Army for Justice under their self-styled Colonel Coriander.

It's the suite of Terrence Cleaves, British Ambassador to the United Nations. Heavily armed, with enough explosives to wreck the whole hotel, these terrorists hold Ambassador Cleaves's two small daughters, who will suffer mutilation unless the American

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government meets certain outrageous political demands, of which the fifty-million-dollar ransom is only a small part.

"Colonel Coriander," identity hidden by mask and wig, has a spy to keep him informed. As intimidation becomes outright murder, Hotel Manager Pierre Chambrun seems defeated. Mr. Pentecost, varying the approach, is concerned less with satire than with increasing tension until it explodes. Though he gives you all the evidence, you should find more than one surprise as Chambrun traps the mastermind for the comeuppance he deserves.

In Michael Bar-Zohar's *The Spy Who Died Twice* (Houghton Mifflin, $6.95) the young Israeli author of *The Third Eye* again triumphs with a second espionage adventure featuring Jeff Saunders, C.I.A.

It is established that Denis Egleton, British agent who also spied for Russia, died and was buried in England. A year later, however, somebody kills the same man during Voodoo ceremonies in Haiti. This flat impossibility, in some way associated with the shooting of a Greek tycoon on his yacht as well as with a treason trial at the Old Bailey, sends Jeff Saunders on a danger-fanged whirl across half the earth. Even when one statesman has been cleared of the charge against him, still more problems remain.

The author, adopting detective-story technique, uncorks a twist ending which has been carefully prepared. The plot is ingenious, the pace fast, the characterization vivid. Here's cloak-and-dagger at its best.

The Judas Sheep by Jan Roberts (Dutton, $6.95) centers round Richard Burns, London art dealer and amateur secret agent, as the mission he has accepted under protest carries him from New York to so many perilous corners of Greece.

Certain C.I.A. bigwigs, sneakier than those in the preceding novel, send this adventurous Briton to learn whether his old friend Stavros Alexandratos, Greek painter and former underground leader, may still be alive despite presumed death in a car smash.

But it's all peril. Flung headlong into a saga of murder, treachery, and buried gold, not forgetting his romance with the beautiful Eleni, Burns remains level-headed enough to outmaneuver menaces even more unpleasant than overfat Kostandis or masquerading Captain Dimitriou. A smashing climax at the monastery leads to ironic farewells before Burns and Eleni board the plane that will carry them to safety. Another for your list.

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a *NEW* short story by

HUGH PENTECOST

Over the years we have brought you many series characters created by Hugh Pentecost. Recently there have been stories about Uncle George Crowder, the lawyer-recluse; John Jericho, the crusading painter; and Pierre Chambrun, the fabulous hotel manager. Now we give you the first short story about Julian Quist, a PR man who wears mod clothes, who is an Adonis in looks, whose girl Friday is "the most beautiful chick around," and who has "a sharp and witty tongue that delights his friends and skewers his enemies." In a phrase, a hip guy—or whatever the newest term may be. . .

THE LONG CRY FOR HELP

by HUGH PENTECOST

The offices of Julian Quist Associates are located in a steel-and-glass finger that points to the sky high above Grand Central Station in New York. Walking in the main door is somewhat like stepping onto a brightly lighted stage set. The walls are a pale pastel. The furniture, eccentrically modern, augurs discomfort until you sit down in or on something and discover that it was designed exactly to fit you.

After a moment or two you ignore the colors, the modern paintings by artists like Roy Lichtenstein and Larry Bell and Don Eddy, and focus on the receptionist, Miss Gloria Chard, wearing a simple little $400 Rudi Gernreich black dress, sitting in the center of a circular desk, juggling telephones, and looking as if she had been designed and put together by some genius in the art of female allure. Mailmen deliberately bring letters to the wrong office just to get a look at Miss Chard; delivery boys bring milkshakes and sandwiches to the wrong place on purpose. Miss Chard smiles

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and smiles and says "no" more often in one day than most girls do in a month.

But Miss Chard is just window dressing compared to what lies beyond in the private offices.

There is, to begin with, Julian Quist himself. He is tall, slender, with carefully styled golden hair that sets off a face and head that might have been carved on an old Greek coin. Public relations is his business—he is an image maker, and he had evidently begun by creating an image of himself. A profile writer for a magazine once described him: "Successful and therefore rich, indecently handsome, with a wardrobe of very mod clothes unsurpassed in any closets in America, and always with the most beautiful chick around who shares both his business and his private life." What the writer left out was a sharp and witty tongue that delighted his friends and skewered his enemies.

The "most beautiful chick around" is Lydia Morton, dark, sultry, who looks more like a high-fashion model than a brilliant researcher and feature writer for Julian Quist Associates. It is no secret to their friends that Quist and Lydia are more tightly bound together than marriage vows could have made them. Men envied Quist for Lydia more than for his success, his good looks, and his clothes. A man who could corner Lydia Morton for himself must be very special, because Lydia could have chosen anyone on earth who interested her.

On the morning of the day that "the long cry for help" was to begin, Quist was in his private office with Lydia and Dan Garvey. After Lydia, Garvey was the most valued of Quist's "Associates." He was the complete opposite of Quist in appearance—dark, weighing perhaps 20 pounds more than Quist, lean and hard. He had been an outstanding athlete ten years ago, with the promise of becoming the best running back in professional football until a knee injury cut short his career. He could have become a movie star but instead he had chosen to go to work for Quist. Dan Garvey was a very good man to have on your side if the going got physical. The fact that he had a Phi Beta Kappa key in his top bureau drawer was something he kept secret from most people.

"So is there anything not done that must be done?" Quist asked his friends. He was sitting at his desk, holding a very long thin cigar between his tapering fingers. His pale blue

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eyes were narrowed against the smoke.

"All set at my end," Garvey said. "Pete and his boy have settled into Jack Jason's apartment. I think we've managed to keep it a complete secret. Jack's son Paul is staying there too, you know, but that will work out well because he's quite willing to keep an eye on Pete's boy."

"The boy's name is Tommy, isn't it?" Quist said. "Tell me about him."

A nerve twitched at the corner of Garvey's mouth. "He gets you where you live," he said, sounding as if it angered him to be moved by something. "What is he, nineteen? Beautiful is the word for him, I guess, with the frightened eyes of a spaniel puppy. He says, 'How do you do, sir,' when you meet him, and 'Goodbye, sir' when you go. In between, if you ask him anything, he turns away, frightened.

"He looks to Pete for help, but he isn't quite sure yet that Pete can or will help him. I asked him how he liked the apartment, and, so help me, it was as if he didn't understand the question. We were standing by the windows, and Pete jumped right in. 'He likes Central Park,' he said. 'Don't you, Tommy?' And the boy nodded. 'And the flowers,' Tommy said. He is a very nice, very well-mannered four-year-old child."

"How terribly tragic," Lydia said.

"Oh, there's nothing about him to turn you off," Garvey said. "Quite the reverse. You want to help him. You *ache* to help him. Trouble is, you don't know how."

"Maybe just with love," Lydia said.

"He seems to have made a complete change in Pete," Quist said.

Quist wouldn't soon forget the night Pete Williams had come charging into his hotel room in Hollywood, where he'd gone on business for a few days. No announcement, just a banging on the door with a clenched fist. Quist had been shocked by Pete's appearance. Some said that Pete Williams was the top song stylist in the world. He had made millions on records, on appearances at Vegas, on television.

Pete Williams had married six glamorous women and left them all drowning in his wake, along with the other women he hadn't married. He had insulted two presidents of the United States at White House parties and been loved for it, even by the presidents. He was like a tornado, devastating the areas through which he passed, but somehow loved for his de-

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structiveness, his irreverence, his cruel gaiety.

But that night a month ago in Hollywood, when Quist opened his hotel room door to a pounding fist, he found himself confronting a Pete Williams who had tears streaming down his face, his body wracked by strangling sobs.

It was a while before Pete could talk, a while after he'd had a generous slug of bourbon. Quist knew him well enough to wait for an explanation. Pete had been a client at one time whom Quist had eventually dropped because Pete managed to destroy every campaign planned for him with his unpredictable behavior. Quist still had a secret affection for him. There was something irresistible about Pete's outrageousness.

The dam broke finally and it all came pouring out of Pete that night. His first wife, Linda, 20 years divorced and long forgotten, had been killed in a plane crash. Linda and Pete had had a son, but Pete had deserted ship when the boy was six months old. He paid his alimony and went his way. He never asked about the boy or knew anything about him—or cared.

"Would you believe, Julian, yesterday some creep called me to ask what I wanted done about Tommy. I'd even forgotten that was the boy's name. What I wanted done? Hell, he was nearly twenty years old. Let him organize his own life. If he needed money—? That's when they told me. The boy is retarded. He's like four-five years old, they tell me. My kid!

"So I go to find out what the hell they're talking about. I figure somebody's trying to put the screws to me. And there he is, Julian—this kid, this beautiful boy. He's scared almost into a state of shock. Linda was all he'd had all these years. Now he's alone and nobody understands him, or how to make him feel safe. And I—I—his father—" And Pete went off into uncontrollable weeping again.

It was a new Pete. He took the boy into his home. He pushed out his friends and cronies and he made an unbelievable effort to provide the unfortunate Tommy with a new security.

A few weeks ago Quist, back in New York, got a call from Pete. There was some kind of national fund drive on for retarded children.

"We'll top it off with the biggest thing ever!" Pete said. "A twenty-four-hour telethon. All the biggest people in show business and sports. I'll stay on it round the clock, sing a

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number every hour—something like that—the number that people ask for who give the most money each hour. Build it up any way you like, Julian, because you're going to stage it. Money no object. We'll call it 'The Long Cry for Help.' "

A network went for it. The Long Cry for Help would go on at midnight on a Friday and run through till midnight Saturday. Actors, singers, dancers, musicians, football players, tennis stars, race-car drivers—people from every conceivable entertainment medium agreed to man the telephones, and once an hour the incomparable Pete Williams would sing the song that had rung up the most money on the cash register in the preceding hour.

It was the kind of generous outpouring of time and talent that show-business people so often give to charitable causes. Some cynics suggest that they do it for the free publicity involved, a libel on the great majority of them. Julian Quist Associates had no difficulty in lining up an All Star cast.

But there was one thing Quist had not dreamed of as he prepared for the twenty-four-hour call for help. He had not dreamed that at the very core of it they would come upon a cruel violence that threatened to blacken the occasion for generous performers and public alike. It was a violence that turned Quist, for a space of time, from a languid sophisticate into a cold avenger.

There had been details to arrange. Pete Williams would have to be in New York for two or three days. He was bringing his boy with him and he didn't want to stay at a hotel. He would be swarmed under by autograph seekers and fans, and Tommy would be subjected to the scrutiny of the morbidly curious. One thing Pete insisted on was that there should be no mention, public or private, of Tommy.

Tommy would not be allowed to go to the theater where the telethon was to be held. Some kind of very private living quarters had to be arranged for, and it was Dan Garvey who found what seemed to be the ideal place. An old friend of Garvey's named Jack Jason had an apartment on Central Park West overlooking the park. Jason, a sports promoter and agent for athletes, was in Las Vegas lining up a heavyweight fight. He was glad to let Pete have his place provided his own son, Paul, could stay there. Actually that worked out very well: Paul was Tommy's age, but very bright, very brash, very mod. The two boys

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couldn't have been more different, but Paul Jason seemed to feel an instinctive sympathy for Tommy and was quite willing to act as a companion during the three days Tommy would be in the apartment.

The night the telethon was to begin Quist had Pete and Tommy and Paul Jason come to his apartment on Beekman Place for a buffet supper, along with Lydia and Garvey. Lydia seemed to hit it off with Tommy from the start. It was as if he had missed female attention since his mother's death. He reached out to her, actually touched her, and couldn't be persuaded to leave her side. At one point she took him out on the terrace which looked down over the East River, where the lights of boats twinkled in the darkness. Tommy didn't seem too impressed.

"I like the park—and the flowers," he said.

"Tomorrow, after your father's show begins, I'll go to the park with you," Lydia said. "Would you like that?"

"I would like that—so very much," the boy said.

Young Tommy Williams was not the only person present who was obviously fascinated by Lydia. Paul Jason, supercharged with energy in comparison with the unfortunate Tommy, was almost comic in his efforts to impress the beautiful older woman. He jumped to his feet to light cigarettes for her, he insisted on serving her from the buffet, he told her brash jokes, he almost elbowed Tommy aside from time to time to get her attention.

"You'd better watch out for your woman," Pete Williams said as he was preparing to leave for the telethon. "Those kids may steal her away from you."

"I spend half of my life fighting off the competition," Quist said. "I wonder if I was so insufferably egotistical when I was nineteen?"

"I was chasing my father's mistress at that age," Pete said.

"Success?"

Pete's face clouded. "Unfortunately. She became my first wife and Tommy's mother."

"I have a strange feeling you can bring that boy a long way up the hill—if you want to," Quist said.

It was time to go and Pete interrupted one of Paul Jason's displays of histrionics. "You're sure you don't mind staying at home with Tommy, Paul?"

"Of course not, Mr. Williams," the boy said. "We'll be watching you on TV."

And so, after an elaborate farewell to Lydia, Paul took Tommy back to Central Park

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West and the rest of them headed for the theater where the telethon would begin.

It was a success from the start. Quist had arranged for dozens of people to call in the minute it began so that contributions would begin at once. Pledges poured in, ranging from one dollar to thousands of dollars. At the end of the first hour Pete Williams sang the song that had been most asked for. He was beaming with delight. That first hour had amassed a sum for retarded children that approached six figures, more than they had dared hope for.

About three in the morning Quist and Lydia said goodnight to Pete. It was time, Quist told himself, that he had Lydia to himself for a while.

"It's going just great!" Pete said.

"See you about noon," Quist said. "Garvey will stand by till then."

"Thanks for everything," Pete said. "It's all working like a Swiss watch."

"Because, of course, I'm a genius," Quist said.

It was about eleven o'clock on Saturday morning, while Quist and Lydia were having coffee on the Beekman Place terrace, that the phone rang. It was Garvey and his voice sounded strained.

"You'd better get over here."

"What's wrong? Pete started drinking?"

"Someone has kidnaped the boy," Garvey said.

"What?"

"Call came in over Pete's open line here. They have the boy—two hundred and fifty grand and the usual 'no cops or else.' "

"Some kind of bad joke?"

"We've tried to call Paul Jason. No answer. They let the boy talk to Pete. He's safe but scared. Pete needs your help, chum."

"Fifteen minutes," Quist said.

One of the things guests couldn't be asked to do while working on the telethon was to keep accurate records of the calls they got—names, addresses, amounts. Calls came one right after another, and the vital information was inevitably fouled up by the performers. Quist had arranged for all incoming calls to be monitored by tape recorders, the tapes to be transcribed by a paid staff of stenographers. This left the guests free to be charming without having to worry about details. So it was that there was a tape of the conversation Pete Williams had had with the kidnaper. And there was a tape of the conversation Tommy had had with his father.

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Pete seemed to have shrunk inside his dark tropical worsted suit by the time Quist and Lydia arrived. The makeup he was wearing for the television cameras hid a grayish pallor. His hands shook as he tried to light a cigarette. What he had to say was unprintable, a long steady string of profanity.

"You'd better listen to the conversation," Garvey said to Quist.

They went into an office of the house manager, off the theater lobby. A tape recorder was set up on the desk and Garvey switched it on. There was the background sound of the voices of people manning telephones. Then Pete's voice, bright and cheerful.

"Pete Williams here. Thanks for calling."

"Listen carefully, Mr. Williams," a muffled voice said. Quist guessed the speaker was holding a handkerchief or towel over his mouthpiece. "We have your boy, and if you want to see him again you will follow instructions to the letter."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Pete almost shouted.

"We have taken your boy and it will cost you two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to get him back. Listen carefully because I won't repeat the instructions. You will be singing a song in exactly forty minutes—at ten o'clock. We will give you one more hour—until your next number at eleven—to arrange for the money in small denominations and unmarked bills. When you have sung your eleven o'clock song you will get instructions on how to deliver the ransom.

"Do not call the police. Do not leave the theater. We'll know if you have because we'll be watching on television. There will be no additional time given you. You will have the money ready to deliver after your song at eleven o'clock. It is then or never."

"How do I know Tommy is safe?" Pete's voice on the tape.

"Listen." There were a few moments of silence and then another voice, also muffled. "They haven't hurt me, Dad. I'm really all right. But please do what they say. I'm awfully scared, Dad." Again a few moments of silence and then the first voice came back. "Satisfied, Mr. Williams? You'd better get moving. You have a little over an hour." The tape switched off.

Quist glanced at his watch. Twenty-two minutes to go.

"The money's arranged for," Garvey said. "Whoever they designate can pick it up at the bank."

Two large tears rolled down

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Pete Williams' face. "He never called me 'Dad' before. When he found himself in trouble he must have come to believe in me. So help me God, if they hurt him—"

"What did he call you before, Pete?" Quist asked. His pale blue eyes had turned very cold.

"He called me 'Father,' " Pete said. "So polite, so formal, in spite of all I did to win him over, to make him feel safe. Now, finally, when he's in trouble—"

"You've called the Jason apartment?" Quist asked Garvey.

"Of course," Garvey said. "No answer."

"Play that tape again and listen to it carefully, all of you," Quist said.

Garvey switched on the tape.

"The boy's voice is all I care about," Quist said. "Just Tommy's voice."

It came through, quick and clear. "They haven't hurt me, Dad. I'm really all right. But please do what they say. I'm awfully scared, Dad."

Quist brought his fist down hard on the edge of the desk. "That's not Tommy. Never in this world," he said.

"The voice is muffled. They had something over the mouthpiece of the phone," Garvey said.

"It's not the voice that gives it away," Quist said. "Tommy hunts for words. He's slow, deliberate. They got the wrong boy."

"What are you talking about?" Pete said.

"Paul Jason." Quist turned to Lydia. "He talked to you enough last night, luv. Is that Paul Jason on the tape?"

"It could be," Lydia said. She reached out to touch Quist's hand and her fingers were cold.

"But why would they—?" Pete began.

"Julian's right. They got the wrong boy," Garvey said. "Paul was trying to let you know that, Pete, by being too glib and by calling you 'Dad.' "

"Why wouldn't Paul tell the kidnapers he wasn't Tommy?" Pete asked.

"If he could identify them he might have been smart enough to realize it would be safer for him not to tell them. Or maybe he just wants to be a hero," Quist said.

"But where in God's name is Tommy?" Pete asked.

"It's crazy," Lydia said, "but it's just possible he's in the park. I had a date with him, remember? He may have decided to wait for me out there."

"So let's go!" Pete said.

Quist stopped him, his hand on his arm. "You're going to have to play it out, Pete. Sing your next number, wait for in-

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structions. Dan will stay here with you."

"But if Tommy's out there—?"

"You owe something to Paul Jason for not telling them where Tommy could be found. Lydia and I will look for Tommy. If we find him we'll call in at once. Play it straight when you get your instructions. You want Garvey to deliver the money—you want an on-the-spot exchange—Tommy for the money."

"And if they don't buy it?"

"You deliver the money the way they tell you—and pray."

"A quarter of a million bucks for another guy's kid?"

"A kid who is trying to save your kid," Quist said quietly.

"Sorry, Julian. I guess I'm not thinking very straight," Pete said. "I'd better get out there. It's almost time for my next number."

"Keep your cool," Quist said.

The fact that Pete and Tommy were to occupy Jack Jason's apartment had been kept secret so that they wouldn't be mobbed by reporters and fans. But "national security" wasn't involved; someone in Quist's office might, inadvertently, have been responsible for a "leak." More likely the kidnaper or kidnapers had made their plans well in advance. Pete and his boy could have been under surveillance all the way from the west coast and been followed right to the door of Jason's apartment.

"There's only one thing wrong with that," Quist said, frowning, as he and Lydia rode uptown in a taxi. "If Pete and the boy were being watched they'd never have assumed that Paul Jason was Tommy. Tommy's dark, Paul's ash-blond."

"That *wasn't* Tommy's voice on the tape," Lydia said. "The more I think about it the surer I am it was Paul's."

"Paul is a little too brash for my liking," Quist said, "but it took real guts to let them think he's the kid they want."

"What will you do if we find Tommy, Julian? Because I have a kind of bone-certainty we'll find him in the park."

"I'll go to the apartment," Quist said. "Paul is bright enough to have left us some kind of clue."

"You don't think the kidnapers may be there with Paul?"

"No. If Pete didn't choose to play along, that would be the first place the police would go—the starting point."

They got out of the taxi on the park side of Central Park West, opposite the apartment building where the Jasons lived. It was a gently warm summer day. They walked down a few stone steps into the

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park itself, Lydia almost running ahead of Quist.

The first person they encountered was a park policeman. Before Lydia could finish her question the man interrupted with an answer.

"I'm sure glad you showed up, ma'am," he said. "That boy's been sitting over there on a bench by the bridal path since almost seven this morning. He said he was waiting for someone, but I was just about to do something about him."

Lydia was literally flying across the grass toward the lone figure on the park bench.

"Something odd about that boy," the policeman said to Quist. "I couldn't get out of him who he is or where he lives. When I pressed him, all he would say was that someone was coming for him."

"He's retarded—and scared," Quist said. "Thanks for keeping an eye on him. I think his father may want to thank you personally. Your name?"

"Moran, Park Police. It was just my job."

Lydia was sitting on the park bench with Tommy, an arm around his shoulders. The boy's face was buried against her shoulder.

"He thought I wasn't coming," Lydia said.

"Does he know where Paul is?" Quist asked.

The boy lifted tear-filled eyes. "Asleep," he said.

"He was asleep when you left the apartment?"

Tommy nodded.

"But that was a long time ago, Tommy."

"Long, long time," the boy said, and turned worshipfully to Lydia.

"Do you have a key to the apartment, Tommy?"

The boy's face lit up with pride. He had been trusted with a key and he now produced it.

"Let me borrow it," Quist said. "And you go with Lydia to our place, Tommy. It's time you had breakfast, or lunch, or whatever. Call Pete, Lydia."

"Of course. And be careful, Julian."

"Nothing to worry about. Jason's apartment is the safest place in town at the moment," Quist said. He turned and headed back toward the street and the apartment building.

There was a self-service elevator in the apartment house, but no attendant was visible. From behind a closed door next to the elevator Quist could hear a television set going, actually hear Pete's voice talking on the phone. On a call board was Jason's name and apartment number, 4B.

Quist took the elevator to the fourth floor and let himself into 4B. He didn't expect to find

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anyone, and there was no one there. The apartment was what he might have expected from Jack Jason, sports promoter. The walls were covered with autographed photographs of famous fighters, baseball players, golfers, football stars. His eye was caught for a moment by a picture of a young Dan Garvey in the days when Dan had been running wild in the National Football League.

Aside from the kind of casual disorder you might have expected in an apartment occupied by two men, there was no sign that any kind of violence had taken place. Quist tried to put it together. Tommy had gone out into the park as early as seven o'clock. The kidnapers had come after that. Paul had probably let them in, not expecting trouble. They, in turn, had jumped to the conclusion that Paul was the boy they wanted.

Paul had chosen not to enlighten them, either because they didn't give him a chance, or because he thought it was safer, or because he wanted to be a hero. He might have thought of the impression that heroism would make on Lydia. They had taken Paul somewhere, forced him to talk to Pete, and Paul had, cleverly, made it apparent that it wasn't Tommy's voice Pete heard.

A boy that alert, that clever, might have left something behind that would be a lead, Quist thought. He was standing by the telephone on a side table and his eyes fell on a memo pad beside the phone. A number was written on the pad, and the number rang a bell with Quist. He had heard that number mentioned dozens of times in the last twelve hours. It was the number given out to call Pete at the telethon.

Quist turned away, scowling. Had the boys thought of calling Pete sometime at the telethon? If the kidnapers had wanted the number they would have taken it away with them. Maybe the boys had thought it would be fun to talk to Pete.

It was then that he saw the tape recorder on the table in the center of the room. Nearly everyone owns a tape recorder in this day and age, he thought. He walked over to the machine and idly pressed the PLAY button. A kid like Paul would probably have a collection of rock music on tapes.

"They haven't hurt me, Dad. I'm really all right. But please do what they say. I'm awfully scared, Dad."

Quist felt the small hairs rising on the back of his neck. The tape continued in silence for a few seconds—and then somebody giggled! It was a crazy

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sound, a self-satisfied sound.

Quist snapped off the machine, and at the same moment he heard a key in the front door. The door opened and Paul Jason walked in briskly, carrying a black attaché case under his arm. He stopped dead in his tracks when he saw Quist.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Quist?" he asked.

"Looking for you and Tommy," Quist said. "Nobody answered the phone."

"Tommy was gone when I got up this morning," Paul said. "I guess he went to the park. But when he didn't come back I—I went out to look for him a little while ago."

"But you didn't find him?"

"No. It's a big park, Mr. Quist."

"What are you carrying in that attaché case, Paul?" Quist asked, in a very quiet voice.

"Just some stuff of mine," Paul said. His eyes widened and there was something like fear in them.

"I'd like to look," Quist said, "because I have a hunch it contains two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in ransom money."

"Money! You better get your head together, Mr. Quist."

"I did—just before you walked in," Quist said. "I found Pete's number on your telephone pad and then I played a bit on your tape recorder. Incidentally, Tommy is safe, so no one has been hurt. But the ball game is over, boy. Just hand over that case."

What happened was a sudden and rather terrifying transformation from a bright eager kid to a dangerous and cornered animal. The boy pulled a handgun out of his jacket pocket and leveled it unsteadily at Quist. There is nothing quite so scary as a gun in the hands of a hysteric who doesn't know how to use it.

"This money is going to my father, Mr. Quist. He owes the Syndicate, and they'll kill him if he doesn't pay. Mr. Williams can afford it. You could afford it. You're all so rich and successful—you and your fancy office and your fancy apartment and that fancy girl you keep!"

"Remind me to wash out your mouth with soap when the appropriate time comes," Quist said.

"I'm going out of here, Mr. Quist. And if you make a move to stop me I swear I'll kill you. My father needs this money and he's going to get it."

"Does he know what you're doing?"

"No. He'd let himself be killed rather than do something like this. But I'm different. I'm going to get him off the hook."

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"And after that?"

"What happens after that doesn't matter. Now stay just where you are, Mr. Quist." The boy began to back toward the door.

Dead heroes don't do anybody any good, Quist thought, and he stood quite still. Paul reached behind him for the door and opened it. He took a step backward into the hall.

And then, suddenly, he came hurtling back into the room, the gun flying in one direction and the attaché case in another. Then he was face down on the floor with Dan Garvey on top of him. Garvey looked up at Quist and grinned.

"I once tackled Gale Sayers like that in an open field," he said.

Quist bent down and picked up the gun. It was fully loaded, lethal.

"I may say I'm rather glad to see you, Dan," he said. "But how—"

"Instructions. Leave the money in a phone booth outside the bank. Sounded amateurish. One of the network girls picked up the money and left it in the booth. I watched. You can imagine my surprise when I saw this little jerk come and get it."

Garvey stood up and brushed off the front of his dark suit. The boy lay still.

"I had him figured ten seconds too late," Quist said.

"The other boy?"

"He's with Lydia."

"Well, I figured this kid might take me to where he had Tommy," Garvey said. "So I followed him. I was just trying to figure out how to get into this apartment when he backed out and I heard him talking to you. I saw the gun, so I hit him low and hard."

"He was risking his neck for his father," Quist said. "A kind of twisted loyalty. I think both the Jasons need help, Dan."

"Don't we all, at one time or another?" Garvey said. "But what the hell do we do with him now?"

"We have a choice," Quist said. "Throw him to the wolves or help him get his head together." He looked down at the unconscious boy. "I think I'll go for the second choice. Dan, let's help this kid."

"Q"

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a NEW short-short by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT THEM

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

Where the highland jungles of the Andean Republic begin an almost imperceptible slope toward those of the United Amazonian States, the tiny *poblacion* of Homero Roldran stands as a last outpost of civilization. The town is less than a hundred years old, and its name commemorates a national poet minor even in his own nation. The massy stone structures of the lowlands and the western highlands, built in colonial times by impressed Indian labor, are missing here; everything is made of wood.

The few streets of the town, beyond the unpaved plaza, show uneven rows of thatched houses; however, the buildings around the plaza itself are decently roofed with corrugated iron. There is the Municipal Palace, the Police Station, the Post Office, the Customs House, and the chapel where once a month a tired priest arrives to say mass; and there is the one fairly large store, the two smaller stores, and the three *cantinas* which sell only raw rum, loose cigarettes, home-rolled cigars, kerosene, and *centavito* candies.

In one room on the upper floor of the large store building, with a magnificent view of the Greater Homero Roldran area plus several hundred kilometers of mountains, lives Billy Bob Blake, the resident American Aid Corpsman. His work is mainly with farmers, and the farms begin behind the plaza.

"You see," he says to a friend, "I have a cow in my backyard." A second later he adds, "You hear her?" Billy Bob Blake is tall, dark, and handsome; but fortune tellers never told him anything about Homero Roldran.

"To tell you the truth, Billy," the friend says, "I already smelled her. Coming in." The friend is fair and chunky and is named, euphoniously, Eugene Levene. Gene and Billy Bob were classmates at the Aid

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Corps School back in Maryland, and Gene is spending one day of a four-day vacation visiting Billy Bob. The other three days are spent coming from and going back to Puerto Lombroso, where he is teaching the use of small cooperatively-owned canning machines. "Smells better than fish," Gene says.

The aged bus which, groaning and grinding, brought Gene up to Homero Roldran from the end of the railroad line included a chunk of ice in its cargo, so the two friends are enjoying drinks of rum mixed with bottled cola, faintly cool. Such drinks in Homero Roldran usually range between tepid and hot. Gene hopes, aloud, that none of the water from the melted ice got into the bottled mixer. "I don't want to get the runs again," he says.

"I already got them," Billy Bob says.

Gene, who has been looking closely at his friend, asks, "So—is that what's got you down? Why don't you take some—I brought along some—" and he reaches toward his small carry-all.

Billy Bob's gesture stops him. "I'm taking some. It helps—I haven't got 'em bad. No, that's not what's got me down."

"Spill me the beans," Gene invites him sympathetically. "Conceal nothing. The girl back home who's been keeping herself pure for you, has she run away with a linoleum salesman? Tell Uncle Gene. He was born under a lucky star, he knows all, advises all, cures all crossed conditions."

Thus encouraged, Billy Bob lets it all out. He had hoped—

For one thing, he had hoped to encourage the malnourished Indian farmers to grow more than just corn and chili. He'd explained and exhorted the virtues of growing upland rice, for example; it is rich in minerals, and for the surplus there'd be a good market. And black beans, so rich in protein.

He had urged the Indians at least to plant their corn in contours along the hillsides, and not in rows going straight up and down the slopes, the soil of which washes away in the rains. Useless urgings, vain hopes and efforts. And he'd demonstrated, also in vain, how to construct sanitary outhouses.

"No wonder they're half starved and sickly," he says.

He had hoped to set up a small cooperative to handle the sale of the wild produce gathered in the bush. "But they just go right on doing things in the same bad old way," he concludes mournfully.

Gene says judiciously, "Well—"

There is a knock on the door. Billy Bob calls, "*Pasé*!" and in

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comes what to an alien eye might seem to be a prematurely aged child but is actually a full grown Indian man in clean but tattered pajamalike cottons. The newcomer takes off a large worn sombrero, presses it to his bosom, and bows.

"Don Esteban," Billy Bob says, "this is my good friend Don Eugenio."

"For to serve Your Grace," Don Esteban murmurs. Billy Bob asks questions, Don Esteban answers. Often he does not, except with a sigh or a shake of his head. After a while he bows again and says, "With permission."

Again Billy says, "*Pasé*," and when the Indian is gone he says to Gene, "Well, there you are. He's the only one who respects me. I dunno why the others don't even respect me, but they don't. I do my best trying to help make a better life for them, but they don't even respect my efforts. And yet they respect Don Lucifero."

Gene gulps his drink and sets down the glass. "Say, who *is* this dude? His name kept popping up in your conversation with Don Esteban."

Billy Bob gestures out the window to the infinity of mountains and jungle bush. "His real name is Niceforo—Niceforo Lopez—but everybody calls him Don Lucifero. I guess not to his face, though. He buys nearly all the bush produce, and he pays pennies or he pays in rum. *When* he pays. They all hate him and they're all afraid of him. How he exploits them! He takes their women. He scoffs at modern methods. Mean-looking, big old fellow with a scar next to his nose where someone cut him with a machete. Too bad that—oh, well, can't blame *him*. Blame myself. Fought in a war I didn't believe in, tried to make up for it by joining the Aid Corps and coming down here, and—"

Gene says, "You can't just tell people this and that. It doesn't even help to *show* them, unless they trust you. You call it respect, I call it trust. Face it, we're foreigners. Aliens. Might as well be men from Mars.

"Why should they believe us? Why *should* they trust us? The *only* way to do it is to join in with them. In doing the big important things *they* do. Whatever they happen to be. They didn't trust *me* at first, in Puerto Lombroso. Didn't invite me to do anything, so I invited myself. When they saw I could haul in a fishnet, they figured, well, maybe this dude *does* know something. The first wedding I went to, had to invite myself. Now *they* invite *me*!"

Billy Bob sighed. "These In-

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dians here aren't really Christians. Aren't even Catholics. Pagan savages is what they really are, although I don't like to say that."

Gene shrugs. "Listen," he says, "if life hands you a lemon, make lemonade. Must be *something* important they do that you could join in on. If they dance in their breechclouts in the full of the moon, well, strip down to your breechclout and dance with them!"

"Haven't got a breechclout."

"Well, *get* one!"

Thus, talking, they drink a lot of rum and cola. Gene stays the night and leaves on the bus early next morning, repeating his advice.

Directing the activities of the American Aid Corps in the Andean Republic is Wiley H. Smith, Ph.D. in Agricultural Sociology, who visits Billy Bob Blake in remote Homero Roldran three times a year. He has already visited twice and departed each time with a sigh and a silent shake of the head.

But on his next visit he views things differently. "I see you got them raising rice and black beans as well, Blake," Dr. Smith says.

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. Taught them contour planting for their corn, too."

"Yes, sir."

"*Very* good." Dr. Smith has a long solemn face, a bald head, and a grizzled chest. They swing into the plaza. "I am particularly pleased with your success in setting up this little co-op for the collection and sale of bush produce—wild wax and honey, raffia, hides, gum, and so on. Why shouldn't they get the most for their labor and their goods?"

"Oh, yes, right, sir."

They turn up the stairs to Billy Bob Blake's room over the store. "And what I find most unusual, and most commendable, you have even persuaded them to build sanitary privies."

"Yes, sir. Let me take your hat, sir."

"Thanks, don't bother, I'll hang it up myself." Dr. Smith opens the door of the closet, gives a slight start, and chuckles. "Ahah, almost fooled me for a moment! One of those simulated shrunken heads, I see —make 'em out of deer hide or something nowadays for the tourist trade."

Dr. Smith hangs up his hat, gives one more look before closing the door, and turns to accept the rum drink Billy Bob is holding out. "Very realistic. Even got a scar alongside the nose. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" echoes Billy Bob. "Yes, *sir*!"

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a *NEW* Interpol story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Sebastian Blue, former Inspector of Scotland Yard, and Laura Charme, whose charm is matched by her brains, are an Interpol team specializing in airline crimes. And now they are confronted by a series of murders using terrorist methods aimed at the top officials of Euro-African, an airline suspected of running guns and ferrying mercenaries to the emerging nations south of the Sahara, wherever it was feared violence and bloody conflict would break out. It was a case full of surprise developments. . .

INTERPOL:
The Case of the Terrorists

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Millie Blake opened the door to the inner office of the Paris headquarters of Euro-African Airlines and allowed the bearded man to enter with his painting. "What's it called?" she asked, studying the abstract design with its embedded bits of wood and metal.

"It's a collage. I call it *Rivers of Power*. See the tiny battery and the wires? And this blue is the river."

"You artists!"

He smiled at her. "Where does it hang?"

"Right behind Mr. Truffet's desk. The gallery loans us a new one each month. He likes variety."

He hung the painting carefully, standing back from time to time to straighten it. "There you are," he said at last. "I wish you a good month with it."

"Thank you," Millie answered with a smile.

After he'd gone she stood for a moment studying the collage of paint and wire and wood. Finally she shrugged and returned to her desk in the outer

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office. She'd been typing about twenty minutes when Felix Truffet returned from lunch. He was a short man with a tiny mustache, and looked nothing at all like the pictures she'd seen of his handsome brother, the chairman of Euro-African. As an employer he'd made her last six months pleasant enough, but lurking just beneath the surface there was a sinister quality she didn't like.

"The gallery sent another artist up with his painting," she announced. "It's unusual."

Truffet stood in his office doorway and grunted. "This abstract art! I'd be better off with another window!"

"He called it a collage. This little battery symbolizes power."

"Such idiocy! I've a mind to send it back."

She returned to her typewriter. "It's different, anyway."

"With that battery and wires it could be some sort of listening device." His voice grew farther away as he went to study it. "It could even be a—"

His words merged with a sudden deafening blast that shook the building and sent a tongue of flame shooting out of the office door. She fought her way through the smoke, screaming his name, but it was too late. She ran to the telephone and called for help. . .

Sebastian Blue was never one to doubt a beautiful girl. Still, as he sat opposite this one he found himself listening to her words as one might weigh the assertions of some television commercial.

"You say he disappeared? People disappear all the time when they're wanted by the police."

Leslie Wallace shook her pretty blonde head. "You don't understand. He vanished more than a month ago—long before this bombing you accuse him of."

She was very British, like Sebastian himself, and displayed the slight superiority that Britons living in Paris often develop as a defense mechanism. His information was that she'd met the artist Raoul Sanburn some months earlier and been living with him ever since. "You see, Miss Wallace, he delivered one of his paintings to Felix Truffet and the painting exploded."

"Paintings don't explode!"

"This one did. It had a thin layer of plastic explosives spread across the canvas. Into this was embedded a tiny battery, a timer, and a blasting cap."

"But Raoul didn't even *know* this Felix Truffet. He'd have no reason to kill him—no reason at all."

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"He might if he were a member of a terrorist group. We've been trying to check Sanburn's background and he seems to have none before he met you and started selling a few paintings. But in the past few months three officers of Euro-African Airlines have been murdered. There was also an attempt on Truffet's own brother, just two weeks ago. Since the crimes took place in a number of countries, Interpol is coordinating the investigation."

"There's still no way Raoul could be involved. I sometimes wonder if he's even still alive."

"Suppose you tell me how he disappeared," Sebastian prompted.

"About five weeks ago we were out driving north of Lille, near the Belgian border. He told me he had to meet someone at a country inn nearby, and he sent me back to Paris with the car. I never saw him again."

"Did you call the police?"

"Certainly, but they were of no help. The innkeepers in the area knew nothing. The police dismissed it as a lovers' quarrel."

"Was it?"

"Not at all. Our relations were the very best."

"And there's been no word from Raoul since then?"

"None at all."

He passed her his card. "Phone me if you should hear from him." On the way out he said, "I'll be in touch."

Lunching with Laura Charme, Sebastian could not help comparing her with the young lady he'd just left. Laura had been his partner for nearly two years in Interpol's division of airline crimes. Half-French, widowed while still in her twenties, Laura was young enough to be his daughter. Still, to a divorced former Scotland Yard man trying to build a new life in Paris, she often seemed more like the answer to a dream. He especially liked to talk over cases with her, drawing out her innate intelligence and common sense.

"An absent artist," he told her as he sipped his glass of wine. "After being missing for five weeks, Raoul Sanburn returned to Paris with a painting that was a real bomb."

"You're certain it was him?"

Sebastian nodded. "He checked in at the gallery, knowing it was the day they changed the artwork at the Euro-African office."

"Let me see the file."

He handed it to her across the table. "Three murders and one close call. A Euro-African vice-president in their Rome office received a potted plant as a

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gift. The pot was filled with potassium chlorate and granulated sugar, with a timing device that set it off in one hour. A highly effective fire bomb. The executive burned to death.

"The second attack came a few months ago at Euro-African's world headquarters in Zurich. A man who gained access to the office on a pretext pulled out an automatic and fired a shot at C. Crown Truffet, the firm's chairman. Luckily the bullet missed him and went out an open window. The would-be assassin fled before the security guards could seize him."

"That's the dead man's brother?"

Sebastian nodded. "The third attack, and second death, came last month in London. Euro-African's operations manager received a statue of a wing-footed Mercury for his office. The statue gave off a poison gas that killed him almost instantly. Now, in Paris, we have Felix Truffet killed by an exploding painting."

"Were any of the other assailants identified?" Laura asked.

"The one who fired the pistol is believed to be a hired terrorist named Cone. Nothing else is known. He simply dropped from sight, the same way our artist Sanburn did. Vanished without a trace."

She smiled at his words. "Off the face of the earth! Like that old British melodrama *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.* That's the one where the barber chair tipped upside-down and deposited its victims in the basement."

"People *do* disappear without a trace," Sebastian insisted.

"Hardly ever—unless they want to."

"What about Benjamin Bathurst? It's quite a famous case. He was returning from Vienna by carriage on November 15, 1809. While stopping over in the small town of Perleberg, Germany, he walked around the horses to examine them while his secretary and his valet watched—and vanished. Completely and utterly vanished."

Laura Charme gave a laugh of derision. "My God, Sebastian, you've been brought up on Charles Fort just like all your countrymen! Fort—an eccentric American who almost went blind reading old newspaper articles in the British Museum. I know, I know—Chapter sixteen of his book *Lo!* 'He walked around the horses.' Along with 'Was somebody collecting Ambroses?' Two of the most famous sentences in all of Fort. But don't you see—it's simply not true!

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"The facts in the disappearance of Benjamin Bathurst are not nearly so mysterious. For one thing, it was night-time on a dark street—a fact Fort conveniently neglects to mention. For another, his servants didn't even realize he was missing till the carriage was ready to leave some time later. He was last seen, quite casually, *near* the horses. But to say he walked around the horses and vanished is sheer nonsense!

"Several months later articles of his clothing were found near the town, but Fort skips that part, too. Bathurst was only twenty-six at the time. I think it likely he simply decided to walk away from the coach in the dark and start a new life. Or he was lured away and killed by robbers. In either event, he didn't disappear as Fort has led readers to believe all these decades."

Sebastian bowed his head in mock defeat. "I'm helpless before your encyclopedic knowledge. But if you don't believe in mysterious disappearances, how do you explain Raoul Sanburn, and his return as an apparent assassin?"

"That," she said quietly, "is what I intend to find out."

"How?"

"It's summer, and I still look young enough to pass myself off as a touring student, bicycling through the French countryside. I'll take a list of the inns in the area where he was last seen and start from there."

Sebastian had long ago given up arguing with her. Besides, she just might find something.

During the two weeks that followed, Sebastian heard nothing from Laura Charme. She filed no reports with Interpol's headquarters outside Paris, nor did she try to reach him at his apartment. Concerned as he was, Sebastian did nothing to find her. Laura had operated under cover many times before, and for him to go snooping around those country inns might well blow her cover and endanger her life.

So he waited.

And used the time pursuing a number of other avenues of inquiry.

Euro-African Airlines was a publicly owned corporation, though much of the stock had been privately held by the Truffet brothers. C. Crown Truffet had started the airline shortly after World War II, mainly as a cargo carrier to link up a number of emerging African nations with the paternalism of European industry. But the airline had quickly turned its back on the Africans, preferring the more lucrative European tourist trade. When its planes

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did venture south of the Sahara, it was usually to bring in guns or ferry white mercenaries to the latest bloody conflict.

"Extortion," Sebastian told C. Crown Truffet, seated across from him in the long luxurious boardroom at Euro-African's Zurich headquarters. "That's the most likely motive. Have you received any demands for money?"

"None," the Frenchman replied. He was handsome and middle-aged, with a deeply dimpled chin that women found attractive. As they spoke, a security guard stood near the windows.

"What about your brother, Felix? Any threats there?"

"We know of none."

"Now what about this attack on you?"

He smiled. "Happily, it was not as successful as the others."

"Did you know this man Cone? Ever see him before?"

"No."

"The police reports say the shooting took place in this room."

"Correct. I was standing there by the open window, with Juan here and my secretary. He entered pretending to be a reporter and fired a single shot. I swear I felt the breeze of the bullet as it went by me out the window."

"The reports say the police found no clues, even after a careful search—not even the ejected cartridge from the automatic."

"Nothing," Truffet agreed.

Sebastian frowned. "Was the gunman right- or left-handed?"

Truffet turned to the security guard. "Juan, you were here. Which was he?"

"Right-handed," the guard said immediately. "I was on his other side, and I didn't see the gun till it was almost too late."

"How close were you to your brother's operations, Mr. Truffet?" Sebastian asked next.

"Close? Not very. We rarely saw each other except for the quarterly directors' meetings. I'm here in Zurich and he was in Paris, and I've been traveling a good deal this past year, since my wife and I separated."

"Oh?"

"She's in England now."

"Any reason for her to want revenge on the company?"

"Certainly not. She has a generous settlement."

"These deaths have affected your stock."

"Of course. There's been some selling."

"Could the terrorist activity be aimed at disrupting your arms traffic to Africa?"

C. Crown Truffet chuckled. "That is a typical policeman's question, Mr. Blue. Euro-African has never admitted any

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connection with traffic in arms, either legal or illegal."

The conversation went nowhere after that. Sebastian departed, glad to be away from that security guard, Juan, whose nervous manner seemed to indicate he wouldn't be caught napping a second time.

Just 16 days after he'd last seen Laura Charme, Sebastian called at the apartment of Millie Blake, the most recent victim's secretary. An unusual summer rainstorm had hit Paris, and as they talked the drops beat against her windows with increasing fury.

Millie was a bright young American girl who'd come to Paris the previous winter in search of adventure, armed with a knowledge of college French and a will to experiment. "It was a cool job," she explained. "The sort of job any American girl just out of college would love."

"What about your boss?" Sebastian asked. "What sort of man was Felix Truffet?"

"He was very considerate, very friendly."

"Ever make advances?"

"What?" She blushed a bit at his question.

"You're an attractive young woman, Miss Blake."

"Not to Mr. Truffet. He was all business."

"What about the airline itself? Was there ever a hint of anything irregular in its operations? Any smuggling?"

"Nothing like that, I'm sure."

"Were there ever any threats made against him? By a disgruntled former employee, perhaps?"

She shook her head. "I've been all over this with the French police. There was nothing."

Sebastian gazed out the window at the slashing rain. "What was Truffet's reaction to the previous killings, especially to the attack on his brother?"

"They were discussed, of course, but he never thought of himself as being in any danger. He felt the attempted shooting of his brother was the work of Crown's former wife."

"Oh?"

"She received a very good divorce settlement—ten percent of the outstanding stock in Euro-African—but she still felt that Crown had cheated her somehow."

"Did you ever meet him? Crown, I mean."

"No. He never came to the Paris office."

"What about his former wife?"

"Heavens, no! She wasn't friendly with Felix at all."

"What's her name?"

"Elizabeth Truffet. She went

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back home to England after the divorce, I guess."

"British girl?"

"So I heard."

"Thank you, Miss Blake," Sebastian said. "You've been a big help."

When he left the apartment it was still raining, though the downpour had lessened to a heavy drizzle. He crossed the street quickly and headed for his car.

"Sebastian!"

He heard the sound of his name, barely more than a whisper, from close at hand. He turned and smiled, recognizing Laura Charme as she emerged from a shop doorway. "I was worried about you, Laura. Where have you been all this time?"

"I was—"

She started to speak, but then her hand came out of her raincoat pocket. He saw the small deadly Beretta automatic pointed at his chest.

"Laura!" He gasped as she fired two quick shots.

Then he was falling, into the gutter where the rainwater ran in a thin stream toward the sewer down the block.

Laura Charme had traveled north toward the Belgian border by bicycle, joining the summer throngs headed for youth hostels and camps along the way. She mingled easily with the long-haired boys and bra-less girls, and if her temporary traveling companions wondered about her age, they gave no sign of it.

There were four country inns in the area she'd discussed with Sebastian, and any one of them seemed the likely site of Raoul Sanburn's disappearance. Her only reason for choosing the Gauguin Inn first was its name. It seemed a likely place for an artist to visit. The Gauguin proved to be a quaint country place off the main highway, a rambling one-story building sheltered by trees.

Leaving her traveling companions, Laura parked her bicycle and went in to the bar.

"I seem to have lost my way," she told a burly man wearing a striped pullover shirt. "Am I near the border?"

"Only a few more miles, Miss. Just join any of the groups on the main highway." He went on dusting wine bottles.

"Oh, good!" She started to leave. Then, in seeming afterthought, she asked, "Could I paint this place? It's so lovely!"

"You an artist?"

"Trying to be. A friend of mine named Raoul Sanburn mentioned this place to me once. I remembered the name as I was passing."

"We get a good many paint-

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ers here," he agreed, "because of our name. Here, let me give you a drink on the house."

"I shouldn't," Laura said.

"One for the road."

"Well, just a little wine." The inn seemed deserted in mid-afternoon and she supposed he was thankful for the company.

"Come again," the man urged as she set down her glass to leave. "My name is Pierre."

"I'll do that, Pierre. Thank you for the wine."

She turned from the bar and started out the door. Well, that was one inn covered; only three more to go. This one had proved harmless enough.

Suddenly her vision began to blur. That was the last thought she had for some time.

She awakened with a terrible headache, lying on a lumpy cot in a darkened room. Even though she could see very little, she was aware of the man beside the cot. "Oh, wow! Now I know how Benjamin Bathurst felt!" She tried to sit up, then fell back again.

The blinds were suddenly opened and the pale light of a summer's evening flooded the tiny room. She saw the burly man, Pierre, more clearly now. "You know Raoul Sanburn?" he asked.

"What did you slip me, anyway?" She held her throbbing head and tried to sit up again.

"Merely some knockout drops. You'll be all right soon. It's no worse than a bad hangover."

"Thanks!"

He pulled up a straight-backed chair and sat down rather heavily. "Now tell me what you know of Raoul Sanburn."

"I knew him at school," she said, hoping that sounded convincing.

"And you came looking for him?"

"Yes."

"What's your name?"

"Laura Charme." She knew he would have searched her knapsack and found her driver's license. "Are you going to let me go?"

She started to swing her legs off the cot, but he caught them, forcing them back up. "Not quite yet. You're too weak to travel."

"Now look here! I could have the police on you for drugging me!"

Instead of answering he walked to the door and opened it. A bearded man entered and walked over to the cot, staring down at Laura. "Do you know her?" Pierre asked.

"I never saw her before."

But Laura recognized him from a photo the police had obtained from Leslie Wallace.

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"You're Raoul Sanburn. I met you once with Leslie."

Sanburn turned to the burly man. "She's lying. I don't know her."

"What are you doing here, Miss Charme?" Pierre asked. For the first time his manner seemed threatening.

"Leslie's worried. I came looking for Raoul. She said he disappeared in this area."

"Well, you found me," Sanburn said. "But I'm afraid now we can't let you go." He turned to the other man. "Pierre, keep her locked in here."

Now she was on her feet. "You can't do that! The police—"

Pierre caught her in a rough bear hug and threw her back onto the cot. He was half turned away when she shot out her right leg and caught him in the neck with a well-placed karate kick. He went down hard, and before Sanburn could move she was off the cot and facing him. "You next?"

He chuckled and held up his hands in a gesture of mock surrender. "You're a real tiger when you're angry!"

"Are you going to let me pass?"

"Let's talk about it, shall we? Out in the bar. I promise no tricks."

She followed him out of the room and down a narrow hall to the rear dining room of the inn. Sanburn ordered two glasses of wine from a bartender she hadn't seen before, and when Laura made a face he asked for the bottle instead. "You can pour it yourself," he assured her. "No tricks."

"Thank you."

Then he told the bartender, "Mike, you'd better see about Pierre. He hurt himself in the back room."

"Are you going to tell me what this is all about?" she asked.

Raoul Sanburn leaned back in his chair. "It's about an airline named Euro-African. For years now they've been supplying mercenaries to emerging African nations, running guns, generally stirring up trouble."

"How does that concern you?" Laura asked.

"A group of us have joined together to stop it—Pierre, myself, Mike over there, and a fourth man named Cone whom you haven't met."

"Stop it how—through bombings and terrorism? Yes, Mr. Sanburn, I read the newspapers, too."

"The weapons we use are the only ones available. And they are no worse than the terror inflicted daily on the people of those emerging nations. Euro-African is in this business for money. Lives mean nothing to

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them. Our objective is to give them a message they can't ignore."

Laura had heard all the old terrorist arguments before. The IRA, the Arabs, the American student radicals of a few years back—all had spoken these same thoughts. The justification for murder. "Where will your killing end? Who's next?"

"You'll see."

"You tell me all this and trust me to leave here?"

He smiled. "I like the way you handled yourself with Pierre. We could use someone like you."

She sipped her wine. "I told Leslie I'd find you."

"You did find me."

"She wants you back."

"Leslie is a spoiled English girl who's always gotten what she wants. She'll find someone else."

"But why did you disappear without telling her anything?"

"There was work to be done. I didn't want a scene, so I simply left her. If she learned too much, it might go badly with her."

The implication of his words was only too obvious to Laura. "And what about me?"

"I said we could use someone like you. I want you to stay."

She hesitated only a moment. Sanburn was obviously attracted to her, or he wouldn't have told her this much. She could safely stay and learn more. If she left, an accident on the road could be too easily arranged. "I'll stay," she decided.

"Fine! I'll get you a room. Tomorrow you can meet the others."

It was two weeks later, on a bright summer's morning under an old willow tree behind the inn, that Raoul Sanburn told Laura they would have to kill Sebastian Blue. "He's been asking too many questions. He's getting too close."

"Who is he?" she asked innocently.

"One of Interpol's top people, in charge of airline crime investigations. He's a former Scotland Yard Inspector, and not likely to be put off the trail."

"How can you manage it?"

"I've sent Cone to Paris to get a line on him. When he has him spotted he'll phone me for the signal to go ahead."

She was silent for a moment. Then she said, "Raoul?"

"What is it?"

"Raoul, let me kill Sebastian Blue for you."

"You? But why?"

"To prove myself. I see the way I'm watched around here. Those two days you were away, Pierre never let me out of his sight, never let me go near a

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phone. You're still not sure of me, and I want to prove I can be trusted."

He gazed up at the sky, thinking about it. Finally he said, "All right, I'll let you do it. When Cone calls, we'll drive down to Paris and meet him. I'll give you a gun, and Pierre will back you up with a second gun in the event anything goes wrong."

"Nothing will go wrong," she assured him.

"You're a cool one, Laura."

Two days later, following Cone's call, they drove south through a summer rainstorm to Paris. Pierre was driving, alone in the front seat, while Sanburn sat in the back with her. "Here is the pistol," he said, passing her a little Beretta automatic. "It's loaded with eight rounds, but you shouldn't need more than two to do the job. Fire at the chest—it's always a bigger target than the head. Pierre will be backing you up from down the block. If you miss he'll finish the job."

"What about you?"

"I'll pick up Cone, then swing back to pick up you and Pierre. This foul weather is perfect for us. The streets should be almost deserted."

"All right," she said, accepting the weapon.

During the past two weeks she'd learned a great deal about the terrorist group that Raoul Sanburn controlled. She knew it was Cone who had made the attempt on C. Crown Truffet's life, and Raoul who had delivered the painting bomb that killed Felix Truffet. She'd learned a great deal about Sanburn himself too, on the first night he'd tried to make love to her.

"It's raining harder," Pierre said from the front seat, peering through the windshield. Though still late afternoon, it seemed almost night-time.

"We'll be there soon," Raoul said.

"Could we stop at a rest room?" Laura asked. "I guess I'm a bit nervous." She slipped the pistol into her raincoat pocket.

When they started up again after the stop, Sanburn was driving. Pierre sat in back with her, and that made her uncomfortable. Ever since that karate kick the burly man had treated her coolly—not really accepting her as one of the small group. She knew he'd like nothing better than a chance to even the score.

The rain had slowed to a heavy drizzle by the time they reached the Paris neighborhood they sought. Raoul slowed the car to a stop at a corner and Cone slid into the front seat. He was a blank-faced gunman

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with skin as white as a skull's, and Laura knew he shot heroin every morning. "Keep driving," he told Raoul. "Blue's gone to Millie Blake's apartment. It's a few blocks from here."

They drove past the building Cone indicated, and then Raoul said, "You get out, Laura. Wait across the street in the doorway. Cone, you might as well stay with me. We'll drop Pierre farther along the block to cover her."

Cone nodded and said to Laura, "Blue is a big man, in his early fifties, wearing a belted raincoat. You'll know him."

Yes, I'll know him, Laura sighed to herself. I'll know him.

She got out of the car, turning up the collar of her coat, and hurried to the doorway. She couldn't see Pierre from where she stood, but she knew he wasn't far away. Despite Raoul's words of trust, he was covering all the angles. If she tried to warn Sebastian, they might both end up dead.

She'd been standing there about fifteen minutes, waiting, when she saw Sebastian come out of the building across the street. He was walking in her direction, probably headed for his car.

"Sebastian!" she called out.

He turned at the sound of his name, seeing her and smiling in recognition. "I was worried about you, Laura. Where have you been all this time?"

"I was—"

Her hand came out of the raincoat pocket, holding the Beretta.

"Laura!" He gasped as she fired two quick shots.

"Perfect!" Raoul Sanburn said as she slid into the front seat next to him. "Pierre couldn't have done it better himself!"

"That's the first time I ever killed a man," she said quietly.

"The next time will be easier."

"Where to now?"

"Back to the inn." He slowed the car again and Pierre jumped in the back, next to Cone. Then they were speeding away through the dark, wet Paris streets, headed north. "I must go away again for a few days, but now I know you can handle yourself. This time there'll be no need for Pierre's watchful eye."

From the back seat Pierre grunted. "He talked to her."

"What?"

"Blue said something to her before she shot him. He called her by name."

Raoul took his eyes from the road to shoot a glance at Laura. "Is that true?"

"Of course not! How would he know me?"

They drove in silence for a time and she was aware of

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Pierre's eyes on the back of her head. After about an hour, as they were crossing the bridge over the Somme River, Raoul Sanburn slowed the car.

"Give me the gun," he said. He stepped from the car for a moment, pulled back his arm, and hurled it far out into the inky water. Then they drove on.

There were only a few cars at the inn when they arrived. Raoul was in better spirits, apparently deciding to ignore Pierre's accusation, and as he led the way to the entrance he said, "This calls for a celebration. We'll open a bottle of champagne."

At first, as they entered, there seemed to be no one behind the bar. Then, suddenly, the figure of Sebastian Blue rose from behind it like a wraith. He held a revolver in each hand and he was smiling. It was the happiest sight Laura Charme had ever seen.

"Please raise your hands, Mr. Sanburn. And the others, too. The French police are in control here."

Pierre turned and tried to run, but Laura skillfully tripped him. Cone had already raised his hands. Raoul Sanburn could only gape. "You're dead—back in Paris!"

"Not quite dead enough, unfortunately for you, Mr. Sanburn. Or should I call you by your real name—Mr. C. Crown Truffet?"

The French police, who'd already seized the bartender and other employees, quickly took charge of Sanburn, Cone, and Pierre.

"Sebastian, you're a wonder," Laura said.

"I had a bit of help from you."

Sanburn, in handcuffs, was smoking a cigarette while they waited for the police cars to be brought from their hiding place. "My attorneys will have me out on bail by morning," he assured them.

"We'll see," Sebastian said. "The Truffet fortune might not stand up against charges of three terrorist killings."

"Why did he do it?" Laura asked.

"His motives have to be pretty much a guess, until we can examine the company's books. But his British ex-wife received ten percent of the outstanding stock in Euro-African as a divorce settlement. It's possible he feared she'd team up with his brother Felix to drive him out of the company. The killings served two purposes—they drove down the price of Euro-African stock, making her holdings worth less, and they eliminated his

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brother from the scene. So long as the blame was placed on terrorists, he was in the clear."

"But how did you know Sanburn was Truffet? For one thing, I thought Sanburn was young and Truffet middle-aged."

"No one ever described Sanburn as young—not even Millie Blake when he brought that painting. Perhaps you merely connected a bearded artist with youth. But the beard is a fake, as I can quickly prove." Sanburn gave a yell as he pulled it off the handcuffed man. "As for knowing Sanburn and Truffet were the same man, I didn't know it till I saw him just now. But there was enough circumstantial evidence to make me strongly suspicious."

"Like what?" she asked.

"For one thing, there was the attempt on Crown Truffet's life. Cone entered the Zurich boardroom and fired one shot at him. But though the police searched the room carefully, they found neither bullet nor ejected cartridge. The bullet may have passed out an open window which was conveniently behind Truffet at the time, but since the testimony was that Cone's weapon was an automatic pistol, there should have been an ejected cartridge. I asked Truffet if the gunman was left-handed, because then the cartirdge might have been thrown back into his clothing—a pocket or pants cuff. But Cone fired with his right hand, and that left only one likely explanation. There was no ejected cartridge because the bullet was a blank."

A wide grin had lit up Laura's face as he spoke. "Of course! It's an automatic's recoil that ejects the spent cartridge and jacks a fresh one into the firing chamber. But when a blank is fired, the gases escape out the barrel and there is no recoil. The slide has to be pulled back manually to eject the cartridge."

Sebastian nodded. "That also explains why Cone fired only one shot. So I was convinced the attack on Crown Truffet was a fake. The very nature of that attack had made me suspicious from the beginning, by the way. Felix Truffet and the other two victims all died by clever mechanical means—a fire bomb in a flower pot, an exploding painting, poison gas from a statue. A mere shooting didn't fit the pattern at all—unless it was a fake to turn suspicion away from Truffet when his brother was killed.

"The attempt on my life today was more proof of Truffet's involvement. He was worried by my question about the missing cartridge case. Once I

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linked Truffet with the supposed terrorists, I started looking at him and our absent artist. Truffet was often away on trips, and Sanburn seemed to have no background before Leslie Wallace met him. When I came here tonight, there was at least a possibility they were the same man. The photo of Sanburn did nothing to dispel that possibility, and when I saw him—when he recognized me—I knew."

Laura nodded. "Millie Blake had never seen Crown Truffet, so she wouldn't have recognized him when he delivered his painting. But of course Crown Truffet would be in a position to know his brother's habit of getting a new picture from the gallery every month."

"That was the original purpose of the Sanburn identity," Sebastian added. "To establish himself as an artist so he could get the painting to his brother through the gallery. Felix Truffet's death had to be the key one."

The police cars were pulling up now, and a French detective put a firm hand on Sanburn-Truffet's shoulder. "What about you?" he asked Sebastian, resisting efforts to be led away. "Pierre saw her shoot you, and so did I!"

It was Laura who answered. "When I stopped at that rest room, I used my nail file to pry the lead slugs from the first two bullets. Then I stuffed a wad of toilet paper into the cartridges to keep the powder from falling out. They made effective blanks when I fired them—but I had to work the slide by hand to get the second bullet into the chamber, as we've just explained." She was smiling slightly. "You and Cone know about blank cartridges, don't you, Raoul?"

"And I played dead," Sebastian said. "I trust Laura more than any other person on earth. When she shot at me, I knew someone had to be watching her. I knew what was expected of me, especially when no bullet hit me."

"What if Pierre had fired another shot?" Raoul asked.

"My third bullet was a good one," Laura said. "I'd have killed him, of course. But I wanted to get you all, and that's why it had to be back here."

Sebastian went on. "As soon as you made your getaway, I ordered a helicopter from the French police and got here first. That part came naturally. I once did something similiar in Turkey."

"But—" Sanburn-Truffet was still baffled. "How did you know where to come?"

"Laura told me," Sebastian said. "She left me a message—

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Sanburn at Gauguin Inn."

"She couldn't have—Pierre was watching her every minute! She didn't drop anything, and if she had, it might not have been found!"

"I was lucky you gave me an automatic instead of a revolver," Laura told him. "As we've been discussing, there's one thing that's always dropped when you fire an automatic, even if you have to work the slide by hand. And it's something that's always searched for and carefully examined by police at any shooting scene. While I was in that rest room I used the point of my nail file to scratch the message on the cartridge cases my gun would eject."

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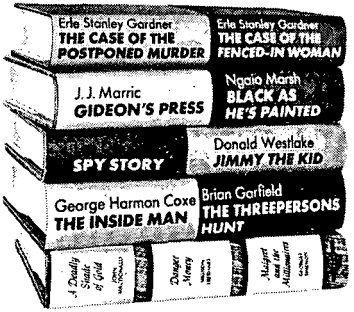

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